NATION

HC proves NEET aspirant's 'torn OMR sheet' claim false

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Markets end flat after hitting record high levels

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

India beat SA by 4 runs to clinch ODI series

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 20 JUNE 2024 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 13 DHU'L-HIJJAH, 1445 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 148 | Pages: 8

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'Darshan fan's ear cut off, body mutilated'

Cops say Darshan gave Rs 30L to hide murder

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The autopsy report of Renukaswamy, allegedly killed by actor Darshan Thoogudeepa, revealed that he died due to shock and haemorrhage after multiple blunt injuries. The report adds that he was brutally beaten, causing his testicles to rupture and was subjected to electric shocks.

One of his ears was also missing and his mouth was mutilated.

Meanwhile, police claimed that Darshan, who has been arrested in the murder case, confessed to giving Rs 30 lakh to accused Pradosh for the disposal of the body and to ensure that his name does not come out.

As per the forensic evidence, Renukaswamy sustained 15 grievous injuries all over his body.

The autopsy claims that there was significant bleeding in his hands, feet, back, and chest.

He succumbed to blood clots caused by the assault. The victim was reportedly beaten with a wooden stick and a belt.

Additionally, the post-mortem report has revealed that dogs had eaten the man's face and some parts of his body.

The accused Darshan and the victim Renukaswamy **PHOTO: SALAR**

Pictures from the crime scene have been circulated on social media, showing a missing ear and multiple bruises on his body. "From the spot of the crime, things such as lathi and wooden logs used for the alleged assault have been recovered along with water bottle, blood stains and material evidence, and DVR containing the CCTV footage," the official said, adding, "blood stains were also found on the vehicle allegedly used for disposing of the body".

A total 17 people, including Darshan and his friend Pavithra Gowda, are accused in the murder case. According to police sources, Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor, had sent obscene messages to Gowda, which enraged Darshan, allegedly leading to his murder. His body was found near a storm-water drain next to an apartment in Sumanahalli here on 9 June.

According to sources, one of the accused, Raghavendra, who is part of Darshan's fan club in Chitradurga, had brought Renukaswamy to a shed in RR Nagar here, on the pretext that Darshan wanted to meet him. It was in this shed that he was allegedly tortured and killed.

The investigation team is believed to have gathered enough evidence, including CCTV footage, which could establish that Darshan was present during the alleged assault on Renukaswamy, leading to his death, sources said. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Darshan case: Court tells media not to report fake news

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

City Civil court issued an order to many media houses on Wednesday, refraining them from publishing any unconfirmed news regarding Darshan. Darshan is accused of being involved in the murder of one of his fans. The court order comes after Darshan's wife Vijayalakshmi sought the court's help to prevent the media from spreading misinformation involving the murder of Renukaswamy, the victim. This action comes after many media outlets reported about a pair of shoes, reportedly worn by Darshan at the time of Renukaswamy's murder. Reports claimed they were found at Vijayalakshmi's house and later seized by the authorities. The order states the media houses are "restrained from printing, publishing, telecasting the news or any other information touching the personal and family life of the plaintiff and her husband Darshan or publishing, telecasting any unauthenticated information". *—Salar News*

HSRP deadline extended to 15 September

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The Karnataka government has extended the deadline for installing High Security Registration Plates (HSRP) to 15 September. All vehicles are required to install HSRPs by the deadline, or drivers will face penalties. HSRPs are mandated by the government to enhance the safety of drivers and their vehicles. These plates feature advanced security settings to prevent fraudulent activities related to vehicle information, improve road safety, and enable better tracking of vehicles. The cost to install HSRPs ranges from Rs 320 to Rs 380 for two-wheelers and from Rs 400 to Rs 500 for four-wheelers, excluding taxes. People can apply for HSRPs online at https://bookmyhsrp.com/. *—Salar News*

AHEAD OF BUDGET

The hike in paddy support price comes despite the government sitting on surplus rice stocks **PHOTO: PTI**

Centre hikes MSP for 14 Kharif crops

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Union Cabinet has approved a minimum support price (MSP) of at least cost plus 50 per cent for 14 crops ahead of the Kharif (summer) sowing season.

MSP of the most popular Kharif crop, paddy, is increased by Rs 117 per quintal — from Rs 2,183 per quintal in 2023-24 to Rs 2,300 in 2024-25.

A legal guarantee for MSP has been a long-standing demand of farmers who have staged large-scale protests, including some held earlier this year, to press for it.

The hike in paddy support price comes despite the government sitting on surplus rice stocks, but it is significant ahead of elections in states like Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Delhi. The MSP of cotton has also been increased to Rs Rs 7,121 for the normal variety and 7,521 for another variety, which is Rs510 higher than the previous MSP. MSP for jowar has been set at Rs 3,371, for ragi it is Rs 4,290, for bajra it is Rs 2,625 and maize is at Rs 2,225. Among pulses, MSP for moong has been decided at Rs 8,682, tur at Rs 7,550 - Rs 550 higher than the previous figure - and Rs 7,400 for urad. *—Salar News*

CENTRE TO SET ₹76,200 CR PORT IN MAHARASTHRA

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the development of a Rs 76,200 crore all-weather greenfield deep draft major Port at Vadhavan in Maharashtra, according to an official statement.

The statement said the project will be constructed by Vadhavan Port Project Limited (VPPL), an SPV formed by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) and Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB), with a shareholding of 74 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively.

The port will be one of the top 10 ports in the world.

The project will create employment opportunities for 12 lakh people, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a press briefing. The port will comprise nine container terminals, each 1,000 metres long, four multipurpose berths, including the coastal berth, four liquid cargo berths, a Ro-Ro berth, and a Coast Guard berth. *—PTI*

PM inaugurates Nalanda University

RAJGIR, 19 JUNE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asserted that he wanted India to re-emerge as the world's "most prominent knowledge centre" with an "advanced and research-oriented" higher education system.

Modi, while inaugurating the new Nalanda University campus here, called upon students to always remain curious and courageous.

The varsity is named after the world-renowned ancient seat of higher learning, which was razed by invading armies in the 12th century.

He said Nalanda bore testimony to the fact that "knowledge cannot be destroyed by fire", and that India was looking forward to playing its role in the 21st century, "which belongs to Asia", by becoming a developed country by 2047.

"More than 1 crore children are getting exposed to latest technology at 'Atal Tinkering' labs. The Chandrayaan and Gaganyaan missions are also boosting their interest in science," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to the ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara, in Bihar, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi also pointed out "till about a decade ago, we had only 100 start-ups. The number has swollen to more than 1.30 lakh. We are also filing a record number of patents and publishing research papers. Our government has announced a special fund of Rs 1 lakh crore to give a fillip to research and innovation". *—PTI*

Video claims slipper hurled at PM's vehicle

Varanasi, 19 June

A video, which went viral on social media shows a slipper being hurled at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vehicle in Varanasi on Tuesday. Modi was on his first visit to Varanasi after winning the Lok Sabha seat for the third time. The incident was widely shared on X sparking reactions from netizens who raised concerns of security breach.

—Salar News

US BACKS TIBET

Former US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi greets Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama during a meeting of US Congressional delegation at his residence, in Dharamsala, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

>>>More on Page 3

CENTRE CANCELS UGC-NET EXAM

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

A day after around 11 lakh students took National Eligibility Test (NET), Union Ministry of Education cancelled the examination on Wednesday, saying its integrity might have been compromised.

To ensure the highest level of transparency and sanctity of the examination process, the ministry said it has cancelled the examination. The Centre said a fresh examination will be conducted and the dates will be announced later. Simultaneously, the matter was handed over to CBI. National Testing Agency (NTA) conducted UGC-NET June 2024 Examination in OMR (pen and paper) mode on 18 June in two shifts. *—Salar News*

SpiceJet flyers sweat without AC in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Passengers who took a SpiceJet flight from New Delhi to Darbhanga have alleged that were forced to wait inside the plane without AC for an hour on Wednesday amid the ongoing heatwave in Delhi.

Several passengers reported feeling unwell due to the oppressive heat as the city sizzled at 50 degrees Celsius .

SpiceJet, however, said that its flight SG 476 from Delhi to Darbhanga on 19 June, scheduled to depart at 11 am, departed on time without any delays.

"The same aircraft operated the return flight to Delhi, and there were no issues with the air conditioning on the return flight either" the airline said.

A senior official in the Ministry of Civil Aviation said that flight operations are impacted because of high temperatures. Flights get delayed sometimes or wait for the wind speed to settle down.

Meanwhile, Health Minister JP Nadda on directed the officials to ensure that all hospitals are prepared to provide the best healthcare to those affected from heatwave. While reviewing the heatwave situation and preparedness of Central government hospitals, Nadda directed for special heatwave units to be started in those hospitals. *—PTI*

GOVT SCHOOLS GO BAG FREE ON ALL 3RD SATURDAYS

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

In a move aimed at lightening the load for students, the government has ordered schools across the State to designate the third Saturday of every month as a bag-free day for the academic year 2024-25

This initiative seeks to address the issue of heavy backpacks burdening students on a daily basis. The Education Department announced the new initiative under "Sambhrama Shanivara" (Celebration Saturday).

Teachers will be equipped with student activity books and guidance manuals accessible through Department of State Educational Research and Training website.

Government bans birthday celebrations in all schools

Meanwhile, Karnataka State government has issued an order banning birthday celebrations in all schools Statewide. This new regulation applies to government, government-aided, and private childcare institutions, and extends to staff, officials, private individuals, celebrities, & dignitaries. *—Salar News*

3 Indians, 4 Egyptians detained in Kuwait fire

DUBAI/KUWAIT CITY, 19 JUNE

Three Indians, four Egyptians and a Kuwaiti national have been detained in the devastating fire that killed 50 people, including 46 Indians, in the southern Ahmadi Governorate in the Gulf Kingdom, a media report said on Wednesday. The massive fire which occurred at a six-storey building in the city of Mangaf on 12 June was caused by an electrical short circuit in the guard's room on the ground floor. *—PTI*

8.1 M GLOBALLY

Air pollution killed 2.1M in India

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Air pollution contributed to 8.1 million deaths worldwide in 2021, with India and China recording 2.1 million and 2.3 million fatalities, respectively, according to a report released on Wednesday.

Published by the Health Effects Institute (HEI), an independent US-based research organisation, in partnership with UNICEF, the report also highlighted that air pollution claimed lives of 1,69,400 children in India under the age of five in 2021.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Nigeria followed with 1,14,100 child deaths, Pakistan with 68,100, Ethiopia with 31,100, and Bangladesh with 19,100, it said.

The report said nearly 50 per cent of all ozone-related chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder deaths in 2021 were recorded in India (2,37,000 deaths), followed by China (1,25,600) and Bangladesh (15,000).

The report also said that air pollution was the leading risk factor for deaths in South Asia, followed by high blood pressure, diet, and tobacco.

It was the second leading risk factor for death among children under five in 2021, after malnutrition. *—PTI*

2 terrorists killed in Baramulla, 2 jawans injured

SRINAGAR, 19 JUNE

Two terrorists were killed and two security personnel injured in an encounter that broke out on Wednesday in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district, officials said.

The forces launched a cordon-and-search operation in the Watergam area of Baramulla in the morning on information about the presence of terrorists there, they said. The officials said the search operation turned into an encounter when the terrorists opened fire at the security personnel. A senior police official said two terrorists were killed in the exchange of fire and their bodies were retrieved from the spot.

The identity and affiliation of the slain ultras are being ascertained. The officer added that a cop and a soldier were injured in the gunfight.

Meanwhile, police arrested a man for his alleged involvement in harbouring and helping terrorists who carried out the 9 June attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, officials said. *—PTI*

ISRO to support flood risk analysis for Kerala dams

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Suresh Gopi has held discussions with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) regarding the use of space technology-based inputs for analysing the flood risk associated with the Mullaperiyar and Idukki dams in Kerala. The MP from Kerala, who is also the Minister of State for Tourism, met ISRO Chairman Somanath S at Antariksh Bhawan here. According to ISRO, Somanath assured ISRO's support in making space-based inputs, such as high-resolution terrain data, available to researchers engaged in flood modeling to assess probable inundation and identify potential rehabilitation areas. —*PTI*

Bengaluru couple finds snake in Amazon package

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

A Bengaluru couple was shocked when they noticed a snake in their Amazon package. The snake, suspected to be a spectacled cobra, was stuck in the adhesive tape used for the packaging, said the couple, who had ordered an Xbox controller from the online retail giant. The couple, IT professionals from Sarjapur who wished not to be named, then made a video which went viral. An Amazon India spokesperson said on Wednesday that the company is investigating the incident. "The safety of our customers, employees and associates is a top priority for us. We work hard to provide customers with a trustworthy shopping experience and it's our commitment to go above and beyond to make things right for them," the spokesperson said. "The package was directly handed over to us by the delivery partner. We have eye witnesses to the same," they claimed. —*PTI*

YouTuber spreads fake info; BESCOM files complaint

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) has filed a police complaint against YouTube content creator Shobha Prabhakar for spreading false information about government schemes related to farmers. According to BESCOM, the five-minute video reportedly stated that farmers would be entitled to a weekly compensation of Rs 100 from the government if they have electric poles or transformers installed on their land. He claimed that farmers would also get free electricity ranging from 2,000 to 5,000 units per month for domestic consumption and irrigation. The video also offered a fictional compensation of Rs 5,000 to farmers who had previously given a no-objection certificate (NOC) for the installation of electric poles on their property. BESCOM said all the information in the video is fabricated and was not approved by the State government.—*Salar News*

Wild elephants in Udupi leave villagers in fear

UDUPI, 19 JUNE

Wild elephants have been roaming freely in deeply wooded plantations allegedly causing a trail of destruction in several pockets of Udupi district, officials said on Wednesday. They damaged areca, plantain and spice plantations in Nellikatte in Udupi in the early hours of 18 and 19 June. Forest Department officials have estimated that there could be two individual jumbos behind the incidents. According to the forest officials, the wild elephants have ravaged the plantations and have even uprooted the sprinkler and drip irrigation systems laid out in the estate owned by one Meena Poojarti in the village. The villagers have expressed fear of carrying on with their daily routine; children are being prevented from going to school. The villagers demanded that the animals be tranquilised and translocated. This is reportedly the first time that wild elephants have entered the human habitations in the taluk, although Hebri is known for its forest cover. —*PTI*

DKS hints at hiking water tariff in City

Water tariffs have not been raised in the past 14 years

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday indicated that a possible hike in the monthly water charges in the City is on the cards as he highlighted the financial strains faced by the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB).

Shivakumar, who is also the Minister in-charge of Bengaluru development, said the loss-making BWSSB has not been able to take up new projects.

The State government had last week hiked sales tax on fuel which has made petrol and diesel costlier by Rs 3 and Rs 3.5 per litre, respectively.

'Since last ten years, the water tariff in Bengaluru has not been increased. It (BWSSB) is suffering a great loss. We have to take up new projects. No bank is coming forward to finance the BWSSB. Now the (Cauvery) fifth phase (water supply project) is going to be completed," Shivakumar told reporters here.

"70 per cent is power bill and labour cost...every year we (BWSSB) are having a big loss. So there is no option. I am working out the possibilities, we are discussing how to set the company right," the Minister said.

Even development agencies like the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the World Bank have contended that the water tariff hike issue is being politicised, Shivakumar said.

"There is no option. We want to show that it is an independent company financially and it works independently .....I have asked officials to examine the possibilities (of hike). Let us see, ultimately we will put all facts before the public domain and then we will take a call," he added. —*PTI*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the loss-making BWSSB has not been able to take up new projects ***PHOTO: X/@DKSHIVAKUMAR***

- Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday indicated that a possible hike in the monthly water charges in the City is on the cards as he highlighted the financial strains faced by the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB).

RENUKASWAMY MURDER CASE

Darshan fan clubs under police scanner

Darshan ***PHOTO: PTI***

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Fan clubs of Darshan Thoogudeepa are now under police scanner as they intensified investigation into the Renukaswamy murder case in which the Kannada actor and his friend Pavithra Gowda have been arrested along with 15 others.

Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor, was abducted from his hometown of Chitradurga by a key club member and his associates and brought to Bengaluru where he was tortured and murdered. His body was found here on 9 June.

According to police sources, Renukaswamy had sent obscene messages to Gowda, which enraged the actor, allegedly leading to his murder.

"The role of fan clubs is very dubious, especially after the Renukaswamy murder case. The Chitradurga Darshan Fan Club convener Raghavendra alias Raghu and his accomplices were instrumental in the abduction of the victim," a police officer said. —*PTI*

No pressure on me to shield Darshan, says CM

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: PTI***

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said he was not under pressure from any minister or MLA to shield leading Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa in a murder case.

Siddaramaiah also said that he will never entertain such requests. "There is a rumour doing rounds that there was pressure on me, which is not true. There is no pressure. Neither from a minister nor any MLA (to favour Darshan). These are all far from the truth," Siddaramaiah told reporters here He said, "Even if someone puts pressure on me, I will not entertain their requests. We have given free hand to the police and I have told them to take action as per law." On changing the Special Public Prosecutor appointed by the government for the trial in the case, the Chief Minister said he has no such information. "There is no proposal in the first place (to change the SPP)."

Will reopen manager's death case if needed: HM

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the State would give its consent if the police feels the need to reopen the case of death by suicide of a man who was working at leading Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa's farmhouse at Anekal in Bengaluru. Darshan was arrested on 11 June for the murder of his fan Renukaswamy who allegedly trolled the actor's friend Pavithra Gowda in obscene language. In all, 17 arrests have been made in the case.

Meanwhile , Darshan's manager Sridhar S died by suicide in April this year, and in a note and also in a video he said that he is responsible for his own death and that no one should be held accountable for it. However, police are probing if there is any connection between the death of Sridhar and the Renukaswamy murder case. —*PTI*

Karnataka contributes 22% to global R&D, says Priyank

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

IT Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday said the State is at the forefront of innovation, contributing 22 per cent to global R&D, and is leading in areas such as technology services. The government is striving to make not just the State but India a skilled nation, research and manufacturing destination, innovation capital and biotech and startup hub, he said.

Speaking at the CII Karnataka R&D Conclave-2024, Kharge said, with close to 250 engineering colleges, 44 Universities, and 25,000 start-ups, Karnataka is the R&D and innovation capital of India. "Our commitment to industry-friendly policies and continuous investment in science, technology, and education drives sustainable growth and better standards of living. We are proud to lead India and impact the global arena," he said.

Priyank Kharge ***PHOTO: PTI***

Any government must encourage constant research and development in the field of science and technology, especially in the startup, engineering and medical ecosystems, he said. —*PTI*

BACK TO ROOTS

Shivakumar may contest Channapatna Assembly bypoll

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday did not rule out the possibility of contesting the Channapatna Assembly bypoll, as he maintained that he will have to abide by the "decision" of the party and voters of the segment.

"Channapatna is in my heart. Channapatna is also the place that gave me political birth," Shivakumar, also the state Congress chief, told reporters ahead of his visit to the town in the neighbouring Ramanagara district.

Channapatna bypoll is necessitated as the seat fell vacant following the election of its representative -- JD(S) leader and now Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy -- to Lok Sabha in the recent elections. The byelection schedule for this Assembly seat is yet to be announced by the Election Commission. Asked whether his brother and former MP DK Suresh will be contesting from Channapatna, he said: "that is not decided. More or less, I'm asking the votes for myself."

Though there were talks earlier that Suresh, who lost from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha segment in the recent elections, may be fielded in Channapatna, speculations are now rife in political circles, especially the grand old party, that Shivakumar may enter the fray to avenge his brother's defeat and to re-establish his clout in the region.

According to sources, if Shivakumar contests and wins from Channapatna, he may vacate the Kanakapura Assembly seat that he currently represents for Suresh.

—*PTI*

H Vishwanath ***PHOTO: PTI***

Guarantees making State bankrupt: Adagur Vishwanath

MYSURU, 19 JUNE

MLC Adagur H Vishwanath alleged that the State government is facing financial challenges and is on the brink of bankruptcy due to the five poll guarantees and "weak economic policies" implemented by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Calling the five guarantee schemes unnecessary, the former minister criticised Siddaramaiah on the financial management and allocation of budget funds. Vishwanath contended that instead of spreading resources thinly across multiple guarantees, the State should have prioritised education and health. He called for the implementation of a free education scheme for all children, instead of spending Rs 65,000 crore on the guarantee schemes.

Addressing the media he claimed that Siddaramaiah, who has presented the Budget 15 times, has lost sight of financial management.

"Ideally, 50 per cent of the Budget should be allocated to establishment costs. However, 70 per cent is being consumed by establishment expenses, leaving only 30 per cent for developmental activities," he said, adding, "Providing free education from class 1 to 12 and ensuring robust health services would have been more beneficial to the people." —*Salar News*

Domestic workers protest in City, seek higher pay

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Domestic workers in Bengaluru protested on Wednesday in front of the Karmika Bhavan, the office of the Labour Commissioner demanding better working rights. The protesters, comprising domestic workers from across the City—including migrants and residents of Banashankari, Bannerghatta, and Koramangala—demanded basic rights and better working conditions.

The protesters presented a signed petition outlining their key demands including: Establishing a dedicated cell within the Ministry of Labour to address their needs, creation of a helpline to report incidents of sexual harassment, improving the efficiency of the existing smart card system, and higher wages.

According to domestic workers' rights activist Yashoda Sumathi, this protest follows a series of unsuccessful attempts to have their demands heard by authorities.

"We've protested before the Labour Commissioner's office and the Labour Minister's office, but our demands have been ignored," she said.

The signed petition was submitted to the Labour Commissioner, SB Ravikumar. The union representatives are now awaiting a meeting with Labour Minister Santosh Lad to discuss their demands. Sumathi stated, "We were assured by the Commissioner that he would discuss our demands with the Minister and schedule a meeting within 15 days."

—*Salar News*

Bengaluru hospital conducts first heart re-transplant in State

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Aster RV Hospital in JP Nagar, Bengaluru, made history by conducting State's first and the country's second heart re-transplant in December 2023.

The patient had been battling recurrent heart failure for seven years. After a successful heart transplant in 2016, he remained stable until 2020. But, in 2021, he experienced severe chest pains leading to a diagnosis of cardiac allograft vasculopathy, a condition characterised by the narrowing of arteries in the transplanted heart.

The re-transplantation possesses risks, including the possibility of the body rejecting the new heart and post-operative bleeding. The survival rate for such procedures is around 75 per cent. —*Salar News*

Govt tightens school cab rules to improve kids' safety

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The Karnataka government has implemented stricter regulations for vehicles transporting schoolchildren to enhance their safety.

According to the new rules, vehicle owners or drivers must obtain a letter from the school principal or parents/guardians. This letter should include specific details regarding information on the vehicle (registration number, model, validity of Fitness Certificate, and insurance), driver details (name, address, license details), and student information (name, parent's name, school name, class, age, and gender). This documentation will be presented to the Registering Authority for vehicle registration or modification as a school cab.

These amendments, published on 15 June, 2024, in the Karnataka Extraordinary Gazette, are part of the Karnataka Motor Vehicles (Conditions for Vehicles Engaged in Transport of School Children) (Amendment) Rules, 2024. These changes were made under the authority of sections 96(2) and 212 of the Motor Vehicles Act, of 1988.

Commissioner for Transport and Road Safety, Yogeesh AM told Salar News, "A key advantage of this amendment is that it will bring a number of unregistered vans, cabs, and other vehicles under the purview of regulations. This will ensure these vehicles adhere to safety standards and driver qualifications. It will also help parents keep track of their children and their well-being."

—*Salar News*

SCAM ALERT

ASHA worker dupes 70 women of Rs 1 crore in Hunsur, flees

MYSURU, 19 JUNE

ASHA worker named Puttamma allegedly cheated 70 women in Hunsur taluk by promising them lucrative returns and extorted at least Rs 1 crore from them. It is alleged that Puttamma, a resident of Biranahalli village in Hanagodu Hobli, convinced these women to give her money, promising huge returns through various financial schemes.

However, after collecting the money, she absconded. She also borrowed jewellery from the women under the pretence of her daughter's wedding. Biranahalli villagers had formed a self-help society, conducting financial transactions within the group. Typically, each SHG comprises 10 to 15 women. The distraught villagers have complained to the rural police station in Hunsur. Puttamma's children Vijayalakshmi and Mangalamma are also reportedly missing. According to police, the fraudulent activities extended across multiple financial institutions including Muthoot Finance, Gram Sati Finance, Chetana Finance, SKS Finance, Union Bank Finance, Gramin Koota Finance, Dharmasthala Finance and Bajaj Finance. Police said they are now struggling to repay the loans they took from various finance companies. —*Salar News*

According to police, after collecting the money, the Asha worker absconded ***PHOTO: COVID-19 CONSTITUTION***

BESCOM HALTS USE OF 32 LIFTS IN LIGHT OF NORM VIOLATIONS

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The State Electrical Inspectorate has issued a notice to the builder and landowners of Subramanyapura and Doddakallasandra housing complexes, instructing them to immediately cease the operation of 32 lifts in two of its towers due to a lack of proper authorisation.

According to Karnataka Ownership Regulation of Promotion of Construction, Sale Management, and Transfer Act (1972) and Rules (1975), every apartment must be registered under the 'Registration of Instruments relating to flats and apartments'. Additionally, they should get approval from the State Electrical Inspectorate.

Residents expressed their worries to **Salar News**, questioning who would be held responsible in the event of an accident. —*Salar News*

Now, 'Project Chandana' to address sickle cell anaemia

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Congress government on Wednesday launched a new initiative, 'Project Chandana', to eliminate sickle cell anaemia from the State.

Sickle cell disease is a genetic disorder in which red blood cells contort into a sickle shape. The cells die early, leaving a shortage of healthy red blood cells and can block blood flow causing pain and a drop in oxygen level.

The project aims to screen 3.52 lakh tribal people in Kodagu, Chamarajanagar, and Mysuru districts over the next two years and provide them with free treatment. In the past year alone, health officials have identified 2,196 individuals from seven tribal districts carrying sickle cell traits. The project will leverage an online registry for patient registration. Diagnosed individuals will be provided with genetic counselling cards ensuring access to free medication such as hydroxyurea tablets, essential immunisations, and blood transfusions at government facilities. It recognises the challenges faced by sickle cell anaemia patients. The initiative will identify and register qualifying individuals as disabled, extending them additional benefits. 55 individuals with sickle cell anaemia have been recognised as disabled under this project.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao launched the initiative on Wednesday, highlighting the need for increased corporate social responsibility contributions to healthcare infrastructure development. The Indian Institute of Science has partnered with the government to conduct screenings, training programs, and awareness campaigns in the targeted districts. The Indian Oil Corporation has also committed Rs 18 crore towards the project under its CSR.

—*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

On RaGa's b'day, INDIA says he 'fought hatred'

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Birthday wishes poured in for Rahul Gandhi as he turned 54 on Wednesday with Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge saying his qualities of unwavering commitment to values espoused in Constitution and his emphatic compassion for the millions of unheard voices set him apart. Rahul, has instructed all Congress workers to avoid any grand celebrations, and instead celebrate this occasion by engaging in humanitarian efforts and charity. Gandhi celebrated his birthday at the AICC headquarters. Priyanka posted a heartfelt message for her brother on social media and said he was her "friend, argumentative guide, philosopher and leader". "He is a leader who stood against anger, hatred and tears," said the party. *—PTI*

Ex-prez Pranab's son wants to re-join Congress

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Former President Pranab Mukherjee's son, Abhijit Mukherjee has expressed a desire to return to the Congress which he left to join the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress in 2021. Mukherjee who was a MP from Jangipur Lok Sabha seat said, "After joining the TMC, I got no such assignments. Their work culture didn't match with that of the Congress at all." Mukherjee further said that in 2019 he lost the polls while contesting from Congress and he was marginalised so he had left Congress and joined TMC. He further said that in 2021 the number of seats of CPI (M) had reduced to zero in the Vidhan Sabha. "In Bengal, I did not want to join CPI (M). I had decided that if TMC does not give me any place then I will fight alone," he said. *—ANI*

Court grants bail to man accused of morphing PM pics

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Delhi's Patiala House Court on Wednesday granted bail to accused Arun Kumar Bereddy arrested for allegedly posting fake and morphed photos and spreading misleading information to malign the reputation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The court noted that though a notice was given to the accused but sufficient time was not granted to him before arrest on 18 June. Metropolitan Magistrate Akanksha Garg granted bail to Bereddy on a personal bond of Rs 50,000. The court has also imposed conditions while granting the bail.
The court rejected the application of the Special Cell of Delhi police seeking three days of remand. *—ANI*

Imran Ansari blasts his supporters after poll debacle

SRINAGAR, 19 JUNE

A video of a Shia leader in Kashmir apparently angry with his supporters after his party's debacle in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls has gone viral on social media. The 19-second video of Shia leader Imran Reza Ansari, the general secretary of the People's Conference, has gone viral on social media and received harsh comments. "I swear upon the grave of my father, I want to tear apart my clothes today. I was in an exalted position, you made me bite the dust," a visibly angry Ansari told his supporters in Kashmiri. Ansari also angrily threw a cup of tea, which he was offered and then goes on to shout at an elderly supporter. However, All Jammu and Kashmir Shia Association said that it was an old video and not related to the elections. *—PTI*

China fumes as Pelosi, US leaders meet Dalai Lama

This comes as US calls for resolution on status of Tibet

DHARAMSALA, 19 JUNE

The Tibetans have the right to self-determination and should be allowed to practise their religion freely, US House Foreign Affairs Committee chair Michael McCaul said on Wednesday after he led a delegation here to meet spiritual leader Dalai Lama.

The visit by US Congressional delegation that included former US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi comes days after US Congress passed Resolve Tibet Bill, calling for a resolution on status of Tibet.

China has warned that it would take "resolute measures" if US President Joe Biden signs the bill into law.

Referring to the Tibet policy bill, McCaul said at the later event that the timing of the visit could not be better. The bill also required aggressively challenging the CCP "propaganda" on Tibet, he added.

At a felicitation ceremony held after the seven US Congress members met the Tibetan leader, McCaul said the delegation had defied a warning from the Chinese Communist Party.

"The Tibetan people possess a distant religion, culture and historic identity and they should have a say in their own future. You should be able to freely practise your religion and that is why we are here today in defiance of the CCP warning," he said.

"Our delegation received a letter from the CCP warning us not to come here. They repeated their false claim that Tibet is part of China since the 13th century but we did not let the CCP intimidate us and we are here today," he said at the event organised by the Dharamsala-based Central Tibetan Administration.

The delegation leader claimed that the CCP was determined to eliminate Tibetan culture and forcibly bring the Tibetan people under its control.

Thanks to kindness of the Indian people the Tibetans who fled their homeland are able to live freely and practise their religion without fear of persecution. *—PTI*

Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama during a meeting with former US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other US Congressional delegation at his residence, in Dharamsala, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

TO FAST FROM 21 JUNE

Atishi writes to PM on Delhi water crisis

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Delhi Water Minister Atishi on Wednesday said that she has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the water crisis in the national capital and threatened to go on an indefinite hunger strike from 21 June if the issue is not resolved within a couple of days.

BJP slammed Atishi, with its Delhi unit president Virendra Sachdeva accusing her of indulging in "theatrics" to distract attention from theft and black marketeering of water, and demanded that the AAP government be sacked for its "inaction".

Addressing a press conference, Atishi said Delhi is grappling with a water crisis since Haryana is not releasing the capital's share of water and claimed that over 28 lakh people are affected.

"We have to understand that the total water supply in Delhi is 1,050 MGD. Out of this 1,050 MGD, 613 MGD comes to the Yamuna from Haryana.

"The amount of water that was supposed to come from Haryana yesterday, that is, on June 18, which was 613 MGD, has come down to 513 MGD.

This means that Delhi is facing a water shortage of 100 MGD today," Atishi added.

"If Delhi is getting 100 MGD less water from Haryana, it means more than 28 lakh people are getting less water.

This is the situation of Delhi today," she added.

The minister rued that at a time when Delhiites need more water due to this extreme heat, there is a shortage of water in the national capital.

Invoking Hindu scriptures, she wrote in her letter, "It is written in our scriptures that there is no greater virtue than giving water to a thirsty person." *—PTI*

Delhi Minister Atishi **PHOTO: PTI**

Kejri demanded Rs 100 cr bribe, says ED as custody extended till 3 July

SHIMLA, 19 JUNE

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal demanded Rs 100 crore bribe from the South Group for his party, the Enforcement Directorate claimed on Wednesday while opposing his bail application in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam.

The central probe agency told the court that if Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which has been arrayed as an accused in the case, commits a crime, the person in charge of the party will be held culpable.

ED told the court that when former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia was made an accused in the case, AAP was not named as an accused.

The judge, meanwhile, also extended Kejriwal's judicial custody after he was produced before the court through video conference on expiry of his judicial custody granted earlier.

The counsel appearing for Kejriwal opposed ED's application seeking extension of his judicial custody, saying there were no grounds to justify his continued incarceration.

During the arguments on his bail application, Kejriwal's counsel told the court that the entire case against him rested upon statements.

According to ED and CBI, South Group is a cartel of politicians, business people and others who lobbied for liquor licences for which they paid bribe to the Delhi's ruling party.

Kejriwal's lawyer claimed there were contradictions in the statements made by several co-accused.

The counsel said the Supreme Court had granted Kejriwal interim bail after being satisfied that there was no likelihood of him trying to escape justice or influence the investigation or witnesses. He also said Kejriwal has no criminal antecedents. *—PTI*

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

EX-CM NAVEEN PATNAIK TO BE LOP IN ODISHA

BHUBANESWAR, 19 JUNE

Former chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday said he would be the leader of the Opposition in the Odisha Assembly. Speaking to reporters, Patnaik said the decision was taken at BJD's legislature party meeting.

"We had a meeting of the MLAs of BJD. They have elected me as the leader of Opposition and leader of BJD legislature party," he said.

Senior MLA Prasanna Acharya was named the deputy leader of the Opposition, while former speaker Pramila Mallik would be the Chief whip of the Opposition in the House. Patnaik named Pratap Keshari Deb as the deputy chief whip of the opposition in the assembly. *—PTI*

PAWAN KALYAN SIGNS IN

Janasena Party (JSP) President and Pithapuram MLA Pawan Kalyan took charge as Deputy Chief Minister, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar with newly joined Kiran Choudhry in New Delhi, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Kiran Choudhry, daughter join BJP ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Former Haryana Congress leaders Kiran Choudhry and her daughter Shruti Choudhry along with their supporters joined BJP on Wednesday, a move which comes ahead of assembly polls in the state due later this year.

Both Kiran Choudhry and Shruti Choudhry had resigned from the primary membership of the Congress on Tuesday, alleging the state unit of the party was being run as a "personal fiefdom", in an apparent reference to former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

Kiran Choudhry is daughter-in-law of former Haryana chief minister Bansi Lal and a sitting MLA from Tosham in Bhiwani district. Shruti Choudhry was the working president of the Haryana unit of the Congress.

Addressing a joint press conference along with the BJP leaders after joining the party, Kiran Choudhry said, "Now I am also painted in saffron colour. But this colour was also the colour of Choudhary Bansi Lal."

The two joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, party national general secretary Tarun Chugh, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and other senior leaders at the party headquarters. *—PTI*

UNION MIN WRITES 'BETI PADHAO' SLOGAN WRONG

DHAR 19 JUNE

A video of Union Minister Savitri Thakur writing the 'Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao' slogan in Hindi incorrectly during an event in Madhya Pradesh has surfaced on social media with the Opposition Congress questioning her credentials.

The event was organised under the 'School Chalo Abhiyan' on Tuesday at a government school at Bramha Kundi in Dhar. Thakur, who is a Lok Sabha member from Dhar seat who has been appointed as Minister of State for Women and Child development, was the Chief Guest.

The video shows Thakur writing the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' slogan in Devanagari script on a whiteboard in an incorrect manner.

Reacting to the viral video, senior Congress leader KK Mishra said, "It is the misfortune of democracy that people who hold constitutional posts and are responsible for big departments are not competent even in their mother tongue. How can they be capable of running their ministry?"

He said Constitution should be amended to fix the minimum educational qualification of candidates in elections. *—PTI*

High Command made my wife contest: Sukhu

SHIMLA, 19 JUNE

Congress leader and Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu Wednesday said he did not want his wife to contest elections, but the party high command insisted she should, and announced her candidature for the Dehra Assembly seat bypoll.

Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur's name appear in the list of candidates released by Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal on Tuesday.

She has been fielded from the Dehra seat against two-time Independent MLA Hoshiyar Singh, who is contesting this election on a BJP ticket.

He said the party leadership had told him during the Lok Sabha elections too that Thakur should contest the elections "but I was not willing".

"This time again when the High Command insisted, I could not refuse" given what the political scenario in the state demanded.

He said his wife emerged as the front-runner in the party survey but he still did not want her to contest as he believed only one person from the family to be in politics.

"I had earlier said that 'Dehra is mera' and my wife would represent me in Dehra for the next three-and-a-half years and ensure development of the area," Sukhu said. *—PTI*

> **I was not willing that my wife contests elections but could not refuse to the Congress High command**
>
> -Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Himachal CM

Kharge seeks relocation of statues in Parliament

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has written to Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha Chairman over the shifting of statues of Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar and other national leaders to a new location in the Parliament complex and has demanded that they be restored to their original places. In his letter addressed to Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha Chairman, he said the statues of national leaders have been relocated to a separate corner "artbitrarily" without any consultation and this amounts to violation of the basic spirit of democracy. He said he has written in the context of relocation of statues of major leaders in the Parliament House complex and the statues have been removed from their prominent places. He said the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in a meditative posture originally installed on 2 October, 1993, in front of the old Parliament building held immense significance for India's democratic polity. *—PTI*

FIGHT FOR RESERVATION

Man demanding quota for Marathas kills self

PUNE/ JALNA, 19 JUNE

A 38-year-old man allegedly died by suicide over the Maratha reservation demand in Pune on Wednesday morning. He took the step after conducting a Facebook Live session on the issue of quota allocations, police said.

The deceased, Prasad Dethe, was found hanging from an iron bar on a truck in Lonikand area. A suicide note was found on his body, a police officer said.

In the handwritten note, Dethe advocated for the Maratha community's inclusion under the OBC category for reservation benefits for which Maratha activist Manoj Jarange has been agitating. The note urged Jarange to continue his agitation until the reservation was secured. It also appealed to prominent political figures such as Pankaja Munde and Chhagan Bhujbal to support Maratha quota rights, the officer added. Dethe worked as a security guard at a private company

Meanwhile, a fast lead by two activists — Laxman Hake and Navnath Waghmare — seeking an assurance that OBC quota will not be disturbed amid the Maratha reservation demand, entered the seventh day on Wednesday at Wadigodri village in Jalna district. The doctors said that their health has started deteriorating. *—PTI*

Activists protesting for protection of the OBC quota **PHOTO: PTI**

Centre says didn't stop Aus envoy from seeing WB mins

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Australian deputy envoy Nicholas McCaffrey was conveyed a "no objection" to meet officials in the West Bengal government at an "appropriate" level, official sources said on Wednesday after the Trinamool Congress accused the Centre of rejecting his request to meet three ministers in the Mamata Banerjee dispensation.

The clarification came after Trinamool Congress MPs Saket Gokhale and Sagarika Ghose accused the NDA government of not allowing the Australian deputy envoy to meet the ministers in West Bengal government.

Gokhale and Ghose also alleged that the Centre is creating hindrance in West Bengal getting foreign investment. McCaffrey sought the meetings ahead of his planned visit to West Bengal.

People aware of diplomatic protocols and norms said a deputy high commissioner or a deputy chief of a foreign mission is junior to ministers in state governments and that is why the meetings sought by the diplomat were not in sync with laid down norms.

A spokesperson for the Australian High Commission did not comment on it but said Australia and India are close friends with strong economic and community ties. *—PTI*

5 die in landslide in Assam's Karimganj

GUWAHATI, 19 JUNE

At least five members of a family, including three minors, died on Wednesday in a landslide following incessant rain in Karimganj district of Assam, police said. The incident took place at Gainachora village in Badarpur Police Station area, Karimganj SP Partha Protim Das said. "Around 12:45 am, information was received about the landslide at a hillock in which a house was completely buried. The Officer-in-Charge of Badarpur Police Station, along with his staff and SDRF personnel, rushed to the spot," he said. The team immediately started the rescue operation, Das said. "After about three hours, five bodies were recovered. There was no survivor," he added. The deceased have been identified as Roymun Nessa, 55 and her children Sahida Khanam, 18, Jahida Khanam, 16, and Hamida Khanam, 11. *—PTI*

Porsche crash: Pune cops submit final report

PUNE, 19 JUNE

Police have submitted their final report to the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) here detailing all evidence against a 17-year-old minor allegedly involved in the Porsche accident in Pune's Kalyani Nagar last month, an official has said. The teen, who the police claim was drunk and driving the luxury car when it hit a two-wheeler in the early hours of 19 May killing two techies, including a woman, is lodged at an observation home in the city. The police had filed a plea to allow them to treat the juvenile as an adult for the purpose of trial in the case. To support their case, the police have now submitted relevant evidence to the JJB, said the officer. "We have submitted all evidence to the JJB proving that he was behind the wheel of the Porsche car," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: dailyexcelsior.com

Veteran photojournalist Nisar Ahmed dies

SRINAGAR, 19 JUNE

Veteran photojournalist Nisar Ahmed, who extensively covered Kashmir over the past three decades, died here on Wednesday. He is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter. Ahmed was admitted to the SMHS hospital here on Tuesday after his health condition deteriorated and breathed his last this morning, his family said. The photojournalist was not keeping well for past couple of years. Ahmad was working with national English daily The Hindu for the past three decades. Various journalists' organisations and political parties have condoled Ahmad's demise. *—PTI*

Delhi man dyes hair to fly as senior citizen, arrested

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

A 24-year-old man allegedly impersonating as a sexagenarian bound for Canada has been apprehended by the CISF at the Delhi international airport, a senior officer of the force said on Wednesday. The passenger Guru Sewak Singh, with dyed hair and beard, was intercepted on Tuesday evening at Terminal-3 of the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport and has been handed over to the Delhi Police, he said.The man was first checked by CISF personnel as his activities were found to be suspicious. He initially produced his identity in the form of a passport bearing the name Rashvindar Singh Sahota, 67. He was supposed to board an Air Canada plane flying out of Delhi on Tuesday, the officer said. *—PTI*

India faces 20% rainfall deficit in June, says IMD

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

India has received 20 per cent less rainfall since the start of the monsoon period on 1 June, with the rain-bearing system making no significant progress between 12 and 18 June, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

However, conditions are now favourable for further advancement of the monsoon into parts of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, coastal Andhra Pradesh, northwest Bay of Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand over the next three to four days, the weather department said.

India received 64.5 mm of rainfall between 1 and 18 June which is 20 per cent less than the Long Period Average of 80.6 mm, it said. Since 1 June, northwest India has recorded 10.2 mm of rainfall (70 per cent less than normal), central India 50.5 mm (31 per cent less than normal), the south peninsula 106.6 mm (16 per cent more than normal), and east and northeast India 146.7 mm (15 per cent less than normal).

The southwest monsoon advanced into parts of the Nicobar Islands on 19 May. It subsequently covered most parts of the south and some parts of the central Bay of Bengal by May 26 along with Cyclone Remal.

It simultaneously reached Kerala and the northeastern states on May 30, two and six days earlier than normal, respectively. *—PTI*

People cover their faces for protection from the scorching heat on a hot summer day, in New Delhi on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Monsoon gathering pace in M'rashtra: IMD

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

The south-west monsoon, which has slowed down after hitting Mumbai, is gathering pace and is expected to progress further by June 21-22, an official of the IMD said on Wednesday. The progress of the monsoon will provide a much-needed relief to north India, which is reeling under an intense heatwave. "Monsoon activity was weak after it hit Mumbai, but it is slowly turning moderate. *—PTI*

Sharp rise in heatstroke cases, casualties in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Hospitals in Delhi are witnessing a spike in heatstroke cases and casualties as a brutal heat wave continues to batter the national capital, officials said on Wednesday.

At the Centre-run RML Hospital, the authorities received 22 patients in the last two days. There have been five deaths and 12 to 13 patients are on ventilator support.

"The victims did not have any co-morbidities. When such people come to the hospital, their core body temperature is recorded and, if it is found more than 105 degrees Fahrenheit and there is no other cause, they are declared as heatstroke patients. Those who succumb to heatstroke are declared as 'suspected heatstroke'. There is a committee of the Delhi government that later confirms the deaths," a senior hospital official said.

To ensure immediate cooling of the body, the hospital has set up a first-of-its-kind heatstroke unit.

At the Safdarjung Hospital, there have been a total of 60 heatstroke cases, including 42 who have been admitted. The hospital has reported six casualties, including a 60-year-old woman and a 50-year-old man who died on Tuesday.

Massive consumption of electricity amid a punishing heat wave sustaining over weeks pushed peak power demand of Delhi to an all-time high level of 8,656 MW on Wednesday afternoon, said discom officials. The peak power demand was on Tuesday recorded at 8,647 MW. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X@TTINDIA

Curfew continues in Balasore for day two after clash

BALASORE, 19 JUNE

Curfew remained in force in the northern Odisha town of Balasore for the second day on Wednesday following a clash between two groups over animal slaughter in which 10 people were injured, an official said.

The administration will review the situation on Wednesday night and decide whether to further continue curfew, the official said. Commercial establishments along with private and government-run institutions remained shut while all the entry points to Balasore town are sealed, he said.

The state government has also suspended internet services in the town till 10 am of June 20 to check the spread of rumour, a Home department official said.

"The situation is critical and miscreants are circulating false and inflammatory messages through social media to disturb the public order in Balasore municipality area," the notification issued by the home department said on Tuesday. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has appealed to the people to maintain peace. He also asked the district administration to take all measures to restore normalcy in Balasore town. Though curfew was in force, the administration relaxed norms for candidates appearing in any examination, government officials, court staff and persons engaged in essential services on production of valid ID proof. Additional Director-General of Police (law and order) Sanjay Kumar said that 35 people have been arrested for rioting and violation of the curfew norms. "At least six companies of the central forces are on the way to Balasore and they will be deployed in sensitive pockets," Kumar told PTI.

He said police was on high alert and keeping a close watch on the prevailing situation. *—PTI*

HC proves NEET aspirant's 'torn OMR sheet' claim false

Court said it is a 'really sorry state of affairs'

AAP workers protest against alleged irregularities in NEET results, in Bhopal on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

ALLAHABAD, 19 JUNE

Allahabad High Court on Tuesday dismissed a writ petition moved by a NEET aspirant (Ayushi Patel) after it was revealed that she submitted forged documents in her petition alleging the NTA failed to declare her result. In her plea, the candidate also claimed that her OMR answer sheet was torn.

A bench of Justice Rajesh Singh Chauhan dismissed the petitioner's petition, deeming it a "really sorry state of affairs" that she filed the petition enclosing the forged and fictitious documents.

Importantly, when the National Testing Agency (NTA) submitted before the court that it was mulling legal action in the case, the single judge remarked that it could not restrain the competent authority/authorities from taking any legal action against the petitioner in accordance with the law.

Essentially, Patel originally claimed that she had received a communication from the NTA in which she was told that her result wouldn't be declared as her OMR sheet was found torn. In this regard, she made several claims against the NTA in a video shared on social media.

Having heard her case on 12 June, the court directed the NTA to produce Patel's original documents to verify her claims.

Interestingly, when all the original documents were produced before the Court, it was revealed that all the documents filed with the petition were forged and fictitious.

—Courtesy, LiveLaw

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Cong, AAP, DMK demand justice for students

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Congress, DMK, will hold protests in all state headquarters on Friday over the alleged irregularities in medical entrance exam NEET, demanding justice for the students.

In a letter to all state unit chiefs, Congress legislature party leaders, state incharges, general secretaries and other top functionaries, Congress general secretary, in-charge organisation, KC Venugopal, said there is an urgent need to address the numerous complaints and concerns surrounding the NEET-UG 2024 conduct.

Venugopal said there are significant concerns over inflated marks and irregularities, and awarding grace marks without disclosing the methodology further raises doubts.

The Mumbai AAP unit staged a protest against the scam, calling it a "national disgrace" and demanded a fresh examination. The protest held at Dadar was part of the party's nationwide agitation against the alleged irregularities in the NEET examination. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

MAN SHOT DEAD AT WEST DELHI BURGER KING

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

The Delhi Police has intensified its investigation into the Rajouri Garden food joint murder case but is yet to identify the victim, even as a foreign-based gangster purportedly took the responsibility of the killing through a social media post.

A man in his early 30s was shot dead Tuesday late evening by two men while he was sitting with a woman at the Burger King outlet at the J Block of Rajouri Garden. A senior police officer said the victim's mobile phone is missing and no other identity proof has been recovered. A bus ticket and a phone charger have been from his pocket along with a gamchha (scarf), he said.

He said the police have recovered a CCTV footage in which the man is seen entering the eatery where the woman was already waiting. Minutes after he sat there, two men came and sprayed him with bullets, firing around 40 rounds to leave him dead on the sport, the officer said, adding the attacker fled from the spot.

The woman who was sitting with him also fledaway, he said. *—PTI*

Hijab ban part of dress code, not against Muslims: Mumbai college

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

A city-based college on Wednesday argued before the Bombay High Court that the ban on hijab, naqab and burka on its premises was only meant to enforce a uniform dress code and did not seek to target the Muslim community.

Nine female students last week moved the HC challenging the directive issued by the Chembur Trombay Education Society's NG Acharya and DK Marathe College imposing a dress code which bans hijab, naqab, burka, stoles, caps and any kind of badges.

The petitioners, second and third-year science degree students, said the rule violated their fundamental right to practice religion, right to privacy and "right to choice."

The college's action was "arbitrary, unreasonable, bad in law and perverse", they claimed. *—PTI*

Kuwait fire: Vijayan writes to PM after minister denied visit

T'PURAM, 19 JUNE

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the "unfortunate" denial of political clearance by the External Affairs Ministry to Kerala Health Minister Veena George to travel to Kuwait in the background of the fire tragedy.

At least 45 Indians, including 23 from Kerala alone, were killed in the fire incident in Kuwait's Mangaf on 12 June.

Pinarayi Vijayan **PHOTO: PTI**

He said that the request amply falls within the purview of compelling circumstances, and non-consideration of the same goes against the principles of cooperative federalism, in which the Union and the states are equal partners in the pursuit of development as well as in mitigation efforts when our people face disasters and calamities.

Meanwhile on the orders of the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the victims' families will receive compensation amounting to Rs 12.5 lakh.

—ANI/PTI

BULLDOZERS IN ACTION

1,200 illegal structures razed in Lucknow demolition drive

LUCKNOW, 19 JUNE

The demolition work of illegal buildings on the river bed of Kukrail river in Akbarnagar has been completed, officials of the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) on Wednesday said.

Around 1,169 illegal residential properties and over 100 commercial properties were demolished using heavy machinery, including bulldozers, they said. The demolition work to vacate the illegal encroachment over an area of 24.5 acre land began in December last year.

Over 1,320 illegal structures, including the religious places of both Hindu and Muslim communities, have been demolished in the area. The LDA officials said that around 100 buildings were demolished on Tuesday and added the work of clearing the debris will be undertaken now.

The state government has proposed to develop eco-tourism **PHOTO: PTI**

The families living in Akbarnagar who lost their houses have been provided alternate accommodation under the PM Awas Yojna in other part of the city. Over 1,800 families of Akbarnagar have received the accommodation. Upholding the High Court's order on the demolition drive, the Supreme Court on 10 May clarified that no slum dweller should be evicted without being given alternative accommodation. On 14 June, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asked officials to immediately remove encroachments on the banks of rivers and ponds.

"There are encroachments on the banks of the Ramganga river in Moradabad. A similar situation can be seen in Kashi, Saharanpur and other districts," the Chief Minister's Office said in a post on X quoting Adityanath.

—Salar News with Agency

Heatwave hits UP glass bangle industry workers

FIROZABAD, 19 JUNE

The next time you see glass bangles, shimmering delicately on a woman's wrist or glittering in a shop, think of climate change.

It's a link that is neither unlikely nor far-fetched but a living reality for lakhs of workers bearing the brunt of rising temperatures that have combined with furnace heat to add up to multiple health complications.

The bangle factories, predominantly small-scale units, lack proper ventilation and cooling systems. Workers often suffer from heat exhaustion, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses. Women often endure longer hours and more physically demanding tasks.

For generations, artisans in this famed 'City of Glass' have braved the heat of furnaces to mould glass into bangles.

The new adversary in already perilous working conditions is climate change, impacting on the future of the Rs 1,000 crore industry that employs five lakh people.

Bangles are crafted through a meticulous process that begins with melting glass.

For glass bangles, molten glass is drawn into thin tubes, cooled, and cut into the desired lengths, which are then reheated and shaped around a mandrel to form circles.

Aastha Dev, who has been working in the traditional industry, where the skill of moulding glass into bangles has been passed down from generation to generation, has been hospitalised twice in the last one month after repeated dehydration and isn't sure how long her health will hold out. *—PTI*

MINI FOREST ON TERRACE

74-year-old Sohanlal Dwivedi maintains Bonsai plants at his house in Jabalpur. Dwivedi, a former government employee from Jabalpur, has created a mini-forest of approximately 2,500 bonsai plants on the terrace of his home ***PHOTO: PTI***

Why has an exam sparked national outrage?

A crucial medical exam in India has sparked anger, protests and allegations of cheating after thousands of candidates secured unusually high marks in this year's test.

National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate), or NEET-UG is the gateway to studying medicine in the country, as its score is necessary for getting admission to a medical college. It is conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), a government organisation which holds some of India's biggest exams.

Millions of students take the exam every year, but only a small percentage get good enough marks to secure a college placement. But this year the challenge is somewhat different: too many candidates have got top marks, pushing down the ranking system and making it hard for even high-scorers to get admission.

Since the results were declared on 4 June, the exam has come under scrutiny for reasons ranging from errors in the question paper and grace marks (compensatory marks) being given in a faulty manner to allegations of paper leaks and fraud.

Students and parents have demanded a re-test and dozens of petitions have been filed in courts to this end.

NTA officials have denied allegations of paper leaks, but on Sunday, federal Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan admitted that "some irregularities" had come to light in certain exam centres. He said that no-one, including NTA officials, would be spared if irregularities were found.

On Tuesday, India's top court issued a notice to the NTA, saying that even if there was "0.001% negligence on the part of anyone it should be thoroughly dealt with".

But all this is small consolation for students who spend months or even years preparing for this highly competitive exam.

Tens of millions of students in India dream of getting into a good medical or engineering college every year - the professions command a lot of respect and also hold out hope for a steady, long-term income in a country with a jobs crisis.

Members of the All India Students Association (AISA) protest over the alleged irregularities in NEET, in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

Of the total seats, 55,000-60,000 seats belong to government-run colleges, while private colleges offer the rest. Half of the seats are reserved for underprivileged students.

Students flock to government colleges for their affordability. A five-year MBBS course in a government college costs between 500,000 and 1 million rupees ($5,992 - $11,984), whereas private colleges can charge up to ten times more.

What led to the controversy?

When results were announced on 4 June, it turned out that an unprecedented 67 students had achieved the perfect score of 720 marks.

Since 2016 - when NEET became the official entrance exam for medical colleges in India - only one to three students have got full marks each year, and sometimes not even that.

This year, there was also a significant increase in the number of candidates scoring in the high range of 650-680 marks, intensifying the competition for seats in India's top medical colleges.

The unusual results sparked concerns among parents and students, who alleged irregularities in the exam's conduct and grading and called for an investigation.

It also said that 1,563 candidates were given "grace marks" for delays at exam centres and because a physics question turned out to have two correct answers. Notably, 50 out of the 67 top scorers achieved perfect marks due to these compensatory points.

The eye of the storm

Surbhi Sharma, 23, who attempted the exam for the fifth time this year and scored 650 marks, alleges that paper leaks - rampant in India - are behind the fluctuations in scores.

She noted that despite a significant increase in high scorers (in the 650-680 mark range), there was no similar rise in mid-range scorers (610-640 marks).

On 1 June, he helped file a Supreme Court petition where 10 students requested that they be allowed to retake NEET, alleging the question paper was leaked at exam centres in Patna, the capital of Bihar state.

The Bihar police launched an investigation into the allegations shortly after the exam was conducted. On 10 May, they announced the arrest of 13 people, including four students, in connection with a paper leak case.

On 15 June, the police sent notices to nine more students suspected of being involved in the case, and asked them to join the investigation.

Manavjit Singh Dhillon, a senior police official, told the Times of India newspaper that the 13 accused had allegedly leaked the question paper to 30 candidates in a "safe house" a day before the exam in exchange for hundreds of thousands of rupees.

Besides accusations of paper leaks, the exam has faced additional allegations of cheating and fraud.

Police have arrested three people in Delhi and six in Rajasthan for allegedly impersonating NEET candidates to write the exam on their behalf. In Gujarat state, police arrested five people for their alleged involvement in a cheating plot at an exam centre in Godhra.

Political slugfest

The controversy has drawn criticism from opposition leaders who have accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition government of "betraying the dreams" of millions of students.

Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence on the issue and accused his government of "covering up the NEET scam". The party has also demanded a Supreme Court-led investigation into the alleged irregularities.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court is set to hear a clutch of petitions related to the NEET exam results - including ones asking for the test to be scrapped - on 8 July.

—BBC News

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Paris may be hottest Olympics ever, says report

The Paris Olympic, scheduled to start on 24 July, may turn out to be the hottest Olympics ever and can prove to be a significant threat, even fatal, for athletes under intense heat exposure, according to a report published on 18 June.

The report has been prepared by climate scientists and is backed by frontline global athletes.

It is a strange coincidence that that the city where the global climate treaty was signed nearly a decade back, in 2015, is suffering from the threat of severe climate impact during the global showpiece event.

The report, Rings of Fire: Heat Risks at the 2024 Paris Olympics, has been prepared jointly by United Kingdom-based University of Portsmouth (UK), the British Association for Sustainability in Sport (UK), Climate Central (USA), and FrontRunners (Australia).

"The Tokyo Games became known as the 'hottest in history,' with temperatures exceeding 34°C and humidity reaching nearly 70 per cent, leading to severe health risks for competitors.

The Paris Games have the potential to surpass that, with climate change driven by the burning of fossil fuels contributing to record heat streaks during the past months," reads the report, a copy of which is with this reporter.

The highest-ranking triathlete in Indian history, Pragnya Mohan, also described the situation as being "scary (and) can be fatal" and recounted how she can no longer train in her home country because of the heightened heat.

Mercury gets the medal

The report has pointed out that the average temperature during the months of the 2024 Summer Olympic Games is on course to rise by 3.1°C since 1924, the year of the last Olympics in France.

"The mean minimum temperatures – which represent night-time temperatures – have increased by 3.3°C, while the number of days with a maximum temperature of at least 30°C in Paris has become increasingly common," states the report.

"2023 was the hottest year on record according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service and 2024 has continued this streak. April 2024 was warmer globally than any previous April in the record books," pointed out the climate experts.

The Rings of Fire report has reminded the deadly heatwave in France in 2003 — which killed over 14,000 people — and subsequent years of record-breaking temperatures, exceeding 42°C; and underscored the heightened risk of extreme heat during the Paris Olympics, especially considering the sharp rise in the region's temperatures since Paris last hosted Games a century back.

The report mentioned that the 2023 heatwave in France claimed nearly 5,000 lives; and 2024 is on track to be the hottest year ever, breaking the 2023 record.

Athletes wary of consequences

Leading global athletes are warning that the intense heat expected at the Paris Olympics during July and August may lead to athletes collapsing, and in worst case scenarios, even dying during the games.

Eleven Olympians, including winners of five world championships and six Olympic medals, shared the concern of possible heat impacts on athletes alongside climate scientists and leading heat physiologists from the University of Portsmouth.

The question reverberates among athletes in the runup to Paris Olympic.

Japanese race walker and 2019 World Champion Yusuke Suzuki explained how heat-triggered illness derailed his Tokyo Olympic dreams; while New Zealand tennis player and Olympic bronze wmedallist Marcus Daniell opined that the heat risk at Tokyo was bordering on being fatal.

"Even if such extreme will not happen, the performance of the athletes is definitely going to suffer," said a senior official attached to the National Olympic Association.

The report recommended several key steps for sporting authorities to counter the situation, including; smart scheduling to avoid heat extremes and keeping athletes, fans safe with better rehydration, cooling plan.

—Courtesy Downtoearth

The report mentioned that the 2023 heatwave in France claimed nearly 5,000 lives; and 2024 is on track to be the hottest year ever, breaking the 2023 record ***PHOTO: PTI***

India races to mine cobalt from Indian ocean in bid to beat China

India is scrambling to secure rights to explore a cobalt-rich underwater mountain in the middle of the Indian Ocean but its bid has come up against competing claims at a time when Sri Lanka, too, is looking to mine the region for precious minerals.

The urgency behind India's application comes from fears over China's presence in the Indian Ocean, at a time when the world's second-largest economy already dominates the global cobalt supply chain, Indian officials and analysts told Al Jazeera.

Cobalt is a critical mineral widely used in electric vehicles and batteries and is seen as a vital element in the green energy transition.

In January, India had approached the Jamaica-based International Seabed Authority, seeking approval to explore the cobalt-rich Afanasy Nikitin Seamount, which is in the central Indian Ocean, east of the Maldives and about 1,350 km from the Indian coast. Formed in 1994, the ISA is an autonomous international organisation mandated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to regulate economic activity on the seabed.

India also paid a $500,000 fee to the ISA to consider its application, in which it spelled out its desire to conduct extensive geophysical, geological, biological, oceanographic and environmental studies in the proposed area over 15 years. The seamount consists of 150 blocks spread over 3,000sq km (1,158 sq miles).

But while evaluating India's application, the ISA found that Afanasy Nikitin Seamount lies entirely within an area also claimed by another country as lying within the boundaries of its continental shelf, according to a note shared by the organisation with Al Jazeera. Though the ISA did not name this other country in its response to India, experts believe Sri Lanka is the nation the seabed authority was referring to. A country's continental shelf is the edge of its landmass beneath the ocean.

According to a note shared by the ISA with Al Jazeera, the seabed authority sought a response from India to its finding of the competing territorial claims. But on 12 March, India said it would not be able to respond in time for the ISA to consider its comments during the ISA's 29th Session of the Legal and Technical Commission, which is considering the application.

As a result, the ISA note states that India's application has been "put on hold". The ISA is expected to review the application again once India responds.

India has sought rights to explore an underwater cobalt-rich mountain. but Sri Lanka also has eyes on the region. The urgency behind India's application comes from fears over China's presence ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA***

Sri Lanka's claim

Usually, a country's continental shelf extends up to 200 nautical miles (370km) from its shore, marking out an exclusive economic zone which only that nation can exploit for economic purposes, even though ships of other countries can pass through unimpeded.

But coastal nations can appeal to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) arguing that the outer limits of their continental shelves extend beyond 200 nautical miles.

That is what Sri Lanka did in 2009, applying for an extension of the limits of its continental shelf from 200 nautical miles to a much larger area. The CLCS is yet to decide on Sri Lanka's claim but if it is accepted, the Afanasy Nikitin Seamount would fall within Sri Lanka's nautical boundaries.

In 2010, India responded to Sri Lanka's submission before the CLCS, without objecting to its smaller neighbour's claims. But in 2022, it changed its position to argue that Sri Lanka's claims would harm India's interests. India requested the commission not to "consider and qualify" the submission made by Sri Lanka.

Al Jazeera sought comments from the governments of India and Sri Lanka on their competing claims, but has not received any response.

Chinese presence

But it is not Sri Lanka that New Delhi is most concerned about, say analysts.

A senior maritime law expert said that India's move appears to be driven more by a desire to establish a foothold in the area to deter any Chinese presence than by any immediate exploration aims.

"India's claim is not aimed at starting exploration immediately but at establishing its presence and stake before China enters the picture," said the maritime expert, who is now a senior official in the Indian judiciary, and requested anonymity because of his position.

According to the ISA, China, Germany and South Korea currently have contracts for deep-sea exploration in different parts of the Indian Ocean.

What's at stake?

KV Thomas, a retired scientist from the National Centre for Earth Science Studies in Thiruvananthapuram, India, echoed the assessment of the senior judiciary official on China being a key factor behind India's decision.

Thomas said that India's deep-sea mining initiatives are at a nascent stage. Yet, in recent years, the country has demonstrated its ambition.

In 2021, it launched a Deep Ocean Mission to explore deep sea resources, with an allocation of $500m for a five-year period.

In 2023, the Indian government said that under the Deep Ocean Mission, it was developing a crewed deep sea mining submersible, which would carry out "exploratory mining of polymetallic nodules from the sea bed". Polymetallic nodules, also called manganese nodules, are rock concretions that serve as vital sources of critical minerals, including cobalt.

At the moment, China controls 70 percent of the world's cobalt and 60 percent of its lithium and manganese – other critical minerals – according to the International Renewable Energy Agency. But India, which has set a deadline of 2070 to get to net-zero emissions, needs access to these minerals to fuel its clean energy economy. *—Al Jazeera*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Noam Chomsky discharged from Brazil hospital

SAO PAULO, 19 JUNE

Renowned American intellectual Noam Chomsky has been discharged from a hospital in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where he had been receiving treatment for some time. Beneficencia Portuguesa Hospital in Sao Paulo announced that his treatment would continue at home. The report came as the 95-year-old's wife, Valeria Wasserman, dismissed media reports that Chomsky had died, saying in an email to AFP: "It's false. He is well." The newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo reported that Chomsky was recently taken to a hospital in the city after a stroke a year ago left. Chomsky first became known in the 1950s with the revolutionary theory that the ability to form structured language was innate and has authored more than 100 books on Middle Eastern conflicts. *—Agencies*

1 dead in Mexico wildfire that forced thousands to flee

SANTA FE, 19 JUNE

Thousands of southern New Mexico residents fled a mountainous village as a wind-whipped wildfire tore through homes and other buildings, and killed at least one person. Officials warned the danger isn't over. New Mexico Gov Michelle Lujan Grisham declared a state of emergency that covers Ruidoso and neighboring tribal lands and deployed National Guard troops to the area. More than 500 structures have been destroyed or damaged, but it's unclear how many were homes. The emergency declaration frees up funding and resources to manage the crisis in Lincoln County and the Mescalero Apache Reservation. Lujan Grisham said two fires have together consumed more than 31 square miles. *—AP*

Senior journalist gunned down in Pakistan's Khyber

PESHAWAR, 19 JUNE

A senior Pakistani journalist has been killed by unidentified gunmen near his residence in the country's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said on Wednesday. Khalil Jibran, associated with private news channel Khyber News, was targeted by the miscreants on a motorcycle when he was heading towards his residence with his friend in Landi Kotal town of Khyber district on Tuesday, a police official said. The official said the journalist's car developed a fault near his home when the gunmen surrounded him, dragged him out of his vehicle and opened fire at him. Jibran, who was also former president of the Landi Kotal Press Club, died on the spot.*—AP*

Police detain leader in wake of revolt against French rule

PARIS, 19 JUNE

Police in the restive French Pacific territory of New Caledonia rounded up eight people on Wednesday, including an independence leader, who are suspected of having a role in the deadly violence that wracked the archipelago where Indigenous Kanak people have long sought to break free from France. The early morning round-up was part of an ongoing police investigation launched 17 May, just days after unrest first erupted, into a wave of armed clashes, looting, blazes and other violence that turned parts of the capital, Noumea, and its suburbs into no-go zones. New Caledonia's prosecutor, Yves Dupas, said that eight people were detained from 6 am in Noumea and its Mont-Dore suburbs. The revolt prompted France to declare a state of emergency on the archipelago.*—AP*

Russia, North Korea vow to aid each other if attacked

Pact was signed during Putin's 1st visit to N Korea in 24 years

SEOUL, 19 JUNE

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed a partnership that includes a vow of mutual aid if either country is attacked, during a Pyongyang summit on Wednesday that came as both face escalating standoffs with the west.

It was not clear what kind of assistance the deal, described as a "comprehensive strategic partnership," would call for.

Putin's first visit to North Korea in 24 years comes amid growing concerns over an arms arrangement in which the country provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile programme.

Speaking after a signing ceremony, Putin said that security and international issues took up a large part of the talks with Kim. He was also quoted to say that Russia would not rule out developing military-technical cooperation with North Korea under the deal.

Kim was quoted as saying that the agreement was of a peaceful and defensive nature.

Russia and North Korea also signed agreements on cooperation in the fields of healthcare, medical education, and science, Russian state media reported, citing the Kremlin's website.

Putin was met upon his nighttime arrival by Kim, who shook his hands, hugged him twice and rode with him from the airport in a limousine in a huge motorcade that rolled through the capital's brightly illuminated streets, where buildings were decorated with giant Russian flags and portraits of Putin.

As the talks began, Putin thanked Kim for North Korea's support for his war in Ukraine, part of what he said was a "fight against the imperialist hegemonistic policies of the US and its satellites against the Russian Federation."

He said the two planned to sign a "new fundamental document (that) will form the basis of our ties for the long term," hailing ties that he traced back to the Soviet army fighting the Japanese military on the Korean Peninsula in the closing moments of World War II, and Moscow's support for Pyongyang during the Korean War.

Kim said Moscow and Pyongyang's "fiery friendship" is now even closer than during Soviet times, and promised "full support and solidarity to the Russian government, army and people in carrying out the special military operation in Ukraine to protect sovereignty, security interests and territorial integrity." *—AP*

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un attend the official welcome ceremony in the Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang, North Korea on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

FOR NEW DRONES

US approves $360M arms sale to Taiwan

WASHINGTON, 19 JUNE

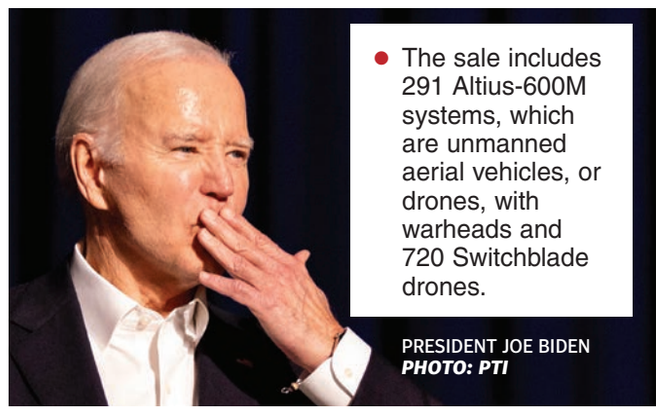
The Biden administration on Tuesday approved a new USD 360 million weapons sale to Taiwan, sending the island hundreds of armed drones, missile equipment and related support material.

The announcement was not unexpected but it comes at a time of high tension between Washington and Beijing, which regards Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to consolidate by force if necessary.

The sale includes 291 Altius-600M systems, which are unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, with warheads. It also includes 720 Switchblade drones known as "extended-range loitering munitions," the State Department said.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te thanked the US for approving the latest arms sale to Taiwan during a press conference Wednesday in Taipei. He said such authorizations help to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

The US statement claimed that the latest weapons transfer would not affect the military balance in the region. The announcement was not unusual, although the US and China have in recent months sought to smooth tense relations. *—AP*


The sale includes 291 Altius-600M systems, which are unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, with warheads and 720 Switchblade drones.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN **PHOTO: PTI**

Red Sea ship attacked by Houthis sinks

DUBAI, 19 JUNE

A bulk carrier sank days after an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels believed to have killed one mariner on board, authorities said early Wednesday, the second ship sunk in the rebels' campaign.

The sinking of the Tutor in the Red Sea marks what appears to be a new escalation by the Iranian-backed Houthis in their campaign targeting shipping through the vital maritime corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The attack comes despite a months-long US-led campaign in the region that has seen the Navy face its most-intense maritime fighting since World War II, with near-daily attacks targeting commercial vessels and warship.

The Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned-and-operated Tutor sank in the Red Sea, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said in a warning to sailors in the region. The Houthis, quoting foreign reports in media outlets they control, acknowledged the sinking. The US military did not acknowledge the sinking, nor did it respond to requests for comment.

The Tutor came under attack about a week ago by a bomb-carrying Houthi drone boat in the Red Sea. John Kirby, a White House national security spokesman, said on Monday that the attack killed "a crew member who hailed from the Philippines".

The use of a boat loaded with explosives raised the spectre of the attack in 2000 on the USS Cole, a suicide assault by al-Qaida when the warship was at port in the Yemeni city of Aden, killing 17 on board. The Cole is now part of a US Navy operation in the Red Sea led by the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower to try and halt the Houthi attacks, though the rebels continue their assaults.

The Houthis have launched more than 60 attacks targeting specific vessels and fired off other missiles and drones in their campaign that has killed a total of four sailors. *—AP*

The Rubymar was hit by Houthi rebels on 18 Feb **PHOTO: AL JAZEERA**

US soldier jailed for nearly four years in Russia

MOSCOW, 19 JUNE

A court in Russia's far eastern city of Vladivostok on Wednesday convicted a visiting American soldier of stealing and making threats of murder, and it sentenced him to three years and nine months in prison.

Staff Sergent Gordon Black, 34, flew to the Pacific port city to see his girlfriend and was arrested last month after she accused him of stealing from her, according to US officials and Russian authorities.

Russia's state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti reported that the judge in Pervomaisky District Court in Vladivostok also ordered Black to pay USD 115 in damages. Prosecutors had asked for a sentence of four years and eight months in prison.

Black's case occurs amid tensions over Russia's arrests of American journalists and other US nationals as the fighting in Ukraine continues.

Russia has jailed a number of Americans, including corporate security executive Paul Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. The US government has designated both men as wrongfully detained and has been trying to negotiate their release.

Others detained include Travis Leake, a musician who has been living in Russia for years and was arrested last year on drug-related charges; Marc Fogel, a teacher in Moscow who was sentenced to 14 years in prison, also on drug charges; and dual nationals Alsu Kurmasheva and Ksenia Khavana. The US State Department strongly advises American citizens not to go to Russia. Black was on leave and in the process of returning to his home base at Fort Cavazos, Texas, from South Korea, where he had been stationed at Camp Humphreys with the Eighth Army. *—AP*

Videos on social media showed dramatic explosions at the depot, which is located close to the main airport in Chad's capital N'Djamena. **PHOTO: BBC**

Explosions and deadly blaze at military depot in Chad kills 9

N'DJAMENA, 19 JUNE

Nine people were killed and more than 40 injured when a fire set off explosions at a military ammunition depot in Chad's capital, a government Spokesperson said on Wednesday.

Spokesperson Abderaman Koulamallah said 46 people are being treated for various injuries after the explosions in the Goudji district of the capital, N'Djamena.

Local media reported the blasts started just before midnight Tuesday and lasted more than 30 minutes as nearby buildings shook and ammunition was thrown from the depot with explosive force.

Explosions and fire at a military ammunition depot in Chad's capital caused fatalities and set off frantic efforts to put out the fire and treat the wounded, authorities and witnesses said on Wednesday.

The fire "caused human and material damage", President Mahamat Deby Itno posted on Facebook. The cause of the fire was not immediately clear.

People living in the area panicked, thinking the explosion was an armed attack, resident Oumar Mahamat said. The situation was later brought under control with security and health officials deployed in the area, Koulamallah said. He urged residents to remain calm. The blasts started just before midnight and lasted more than 30 minutes as nearby buildings shook and ammunition was thrown from the depot with explosive force. *—PTI*

RAMAPHOSA TAKES OATH AS S AFRICA PRESIDENT AGAIN

CAPE TOWN, 19 JUNE

South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa was sworn in for a second term in office as president, despite failing to security a majority in parliament in last month's election for his African National Congress (ANC).

Lawmakers re-elected him to stay on as president last week following a deal to form a coalition government between the ANC, its long-time rival Democratic Alliance (DA) and other parties.

The ANC, which has governed since the end of apartheid in 1994, lost its majority for the first time after the 29 May election produced no outright winner. Many heads of states and dignitaries from around the world are expected to attend the inauguration ceremony being held in the capital, Pretoria. The presidency has listed some of the countries that will be "represented at a high level" at the inauguration, including Angola, Uganda, Mozambique, China, Egypt, the State of Palestine and Cuba. *—BBC News*

323 EGYPTIANS KILLED

550 Muslim pilgrims die in blazing heat of 52°C as Hajj ends

MINA, 19 JUNE

At least 550 pilgrims died as Muslim pilgrims wrapped up the Hajj in the deadly summer heat on Tuesday with the third day of the symbolic stoning of the devil, and the last circumambulation around the Kaaba, Islam's holiest site, in the city of Mecca

The three-day stoning ritual in Mina, a desert site outside Mecca, is among the final rites of the pilgrimage and symbolizes the casting away of evil and sin. It started a day after pilgrims congregated on Saturday at a sacred hill known as Mount Arafat.

The final days of the annual Hajj coincide with Muslims around the world celebrating the Eid al-Adha holiday when the faithful with financial means commemorate Prophet Ibrahim's test of faith, when God ordered him to sacrifice his only son, by slaughtering livestock and animals and distributing the meat to the poor.

The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. Its rituals largely commemorate the accounts of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail, Ismail's mother Hajar and the Prophet Muhammad, according to the Quran, Islam's holy book. In the Islamic version, God stayed his hand and Ismail was spared.

"I am reassured. I feel comfortable," Mejahed al-Mehrabi, a Yemeni pilgrim, told The Associated Press after he was done with the third day of the stoning ritual. "Anyone who can visit the Grand Mosque (in Mecca) should do so."

The burning sun and suffocating hot weather were relentless on Tuesday, with temperatures expected to reach 47 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit) in Mecca and the sacred sites in and around the city, according to the Saudi National Center for Metrology.

Many pilgrims, particularly elderly ones, collapsed and required medical assistance because of the heat. Dozens were also reported to have died from sunstroke.

At least 323 of those who died were Egyptians, most of them succumbing to heat-related illnesses.

At least 60 Jordanians also died, the diplomats said, up from an official tally of 41 given earlier on Tuesday by Amman.

The pilgrimage is increasingly affected by climate change, according to a Saudi study published last month that said temperatures in the area where rituals are performed were rising 0.4 degrees

Saudi authorities have reported treating more than 2,000 pilgrims suffering from heat stress but have not updated that figure since Sunday and have not provided information on fatalities.

Many other pilgrims couldn't be accounted for while performing the rituals. Many Egyptians took to social medial to search for their relatives they believed were in Mount Arafat and in Mina. Some were found in hospitals around Mecca, after collapsing from the heat.

After the third symbolic stoning Tuesday, pilgrims headed to Mecca to perform "tawaf," the circling the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque counterclockwise seven times.

That circumambulation, known as the Farewell Tawaf, marks the end of Hajj as pilgrims prepare to leave the holy city. *—Agencies*

Pilgrims use umbrellas to shield themselves from the sun as they arrive to cast stones at pillars, the last rite of Hajj, in Mina **PHOTO: AP**

Rupee slips 1P to settle at 83.44 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

The rupee paired its initial gains and settled 1 paisa lower at 83.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday in sink with the domestic equity markets that turned choppy at the fag-end of the session. Forex traders said the gaining momentum in the local unit was snapped by a firm American currency and higher level of crude oil prices in the overseas market. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.39 and moved in the range of 83.34 and 83.48 against the greenback during the session. The local unit finally settled at 83.44 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a loss of 1 paisa from previous closing level. On Tuesday, the rupee had settled 12 paise higher at 83.43 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.01 per cent at 104.88. *—PTI*

Gold rises ₹80; silver climbs ₹100

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Gold prices rose Rs 80 to Rs 72,430 per 10 grams in the local market on Wednesday in line with firm trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,350 per 10 grams on Tuesday. "In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carat) are trading at Rs 72,430 per 10 grams, up by Rs 80 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. Silver prices also climbed Rs 100 to Rs 91,400 per kg. It had ended at Rs 91,300 per kg in the previous session. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,327 per ounce, up USD 8 from the previous close. In addition, silver was up at USD 29.40 per ounce. In the previous session, it had finished at USD 29.35 per ounce. *—PTI*

SBI Chairman asks for tax relief on interest income

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

State Bank of India Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara has pitched for tax relief on interest income, saying it would help banks to garner savings that could be used for funding long-term infra projects. Currently, banks are required to deduct tax when interest income from deposits held in all the bank branches put together is more than Rs 40,000 in a year. With regard to savings accounts, interest earned up to Rs 10,000 is exempt from tax. "If at all some relief could be given in the Budget regarding tax on the interest earnings, it will be an incentive to depositors. Eventually, the banking sector uses deposits mobilised for the capital formation in the country," he told PTI in an interview. The Full Budget for 2024-25 is likely to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament next month. Given the current economic growth rate, the SBI chairman is expecting 14-15 per cent loan growth during the fiscal year 2024-25. *—PTI*

Zee Entertainment shares decline over 4 per cent

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises on Wednesday declined over 4 per cent after the company witnessed another top-level exit, as its Chief Financial Officer Rohit Kumar Gupta resigned. The stock dropped 4 per cent to Rs 154.35 on the BSE. On the NSE, it went lower 4.11 per cent to Rs 154.30. Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) has now elevated Mukund Galgali, as an acting Chief Financial Officer of the company, according to a regulatory filing from ZEEL on Tuesday. The board of the company has approved the promotion of Galgali, who is with the group for over 17 years and currently spearheading the Commercial & Strategic Initiatives of the company, it added. *—PTI*

Adani to invest $100bn in energy transition

It will produce components for green energy

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Adani group will invest more than USD 100 billion (around Rs 8.34 lakh crore) in energy transition projects and manufacturing capability to produce every major component required for green energy generation, its chairman said on Wednesday.

Besides building solar parks to produce electricity from sunlight and wind farms that do the same from wind, the conglomerate is building major facilities to manufacture electrolysers for making green hydrogen, wind power turbines and solar panels.

Green hydrogen, which is made by splitting hydrogen from water with the help of electrolysers powered by clean energy, is seen as a potential panacea for decarbonising the industry as well as transportation.

Speaking at 'Infrastructure - the Catalyst for India's Future' event of Crisil, Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani said energy transition and digital infrastructure are trillion-dollar opportunities which will transform India both at a local and at a global scale.

Gautam Adani *PHOTO: ANI*

- The global transition market was valued at approximately USD 3 trillion in 2023 and is expected to grow to nearly USD 6 trillion by 2030, and thereafter double every 10 years till 2050

The coal-to-ports group wants to produce the "world's least expensive green electron" that will become the feedstock for several sectors that must meet the sustainability mandate.

Adani said the energy transition space will fundamentally change the global energy landscape forever.

"The global transition market was valued at approximately USD 3 trillion in 2023 and is expected to grow to nearly USD 6 trillion by 2030, and thereafter double every 10 years till 2050."

Adani group's digital footprint will span industrial clouds across each of its businesses that it will productise and then take to market, operational technology cybersecurity offerings, super apps to leverage its B2C businesses across wide variety of consumer facing businesses, Artificial Intelligence labs to capitalise on India's fast emerging expertise to provide AI services to the world, and Data Centres that will form the backbone of the energy intensive digital revolution. *—PTI*

LANKA SC SEEKS ADANI'S RESPONSE ON WIND PROJECT

COLOMBO, 19 JUNE

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court has given Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, the Cabinet and the Adani Group three weeks to file preliminary objections to a petition filed by an environmental group against the wind power project undertaken by the Indian conglomerate in the country.

Sri Lanka's Adani Group renewable project entails two wind energy projects; a 250 MW in the northeastern district of Mannar and a 234 MW project at Pooneryn in the north. The total investment was to be USD 750 million.

On Tuesday, a three-member bench of the apex court gave the prime minister, the Cabinet and the Adani Group three weeks to file preliminary objections to the rights petition against the project.

An environmental rights group had claimed in court that a decision by the Cabinet to treat the Adani wind power project as a Sri Lanka-India government-to-government venture was illegal and that it would cause immense damage to the migratory bird population causing environmental hazards. *—PTI*

BSE CLIMBS 36.45 POINTS

Markets end flat after hitting record high levels

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended flat on Wednesday after hitting new lifetime peaks during the session on the emergence of profit-taking amid a lack of immediate triggers.

In a volatile trade, profit booking in consumer durables, capital goods and energy shares negated strong gains in banking and financial stocks.

Rallying for the fifth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 36.45 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 77,337.59. During the day, it soared 550.49 points or 0.71 per cent to hit the fresh lifetime peak of 77,851.63.

The NSE Nifty ended at 23,516, down 41.90 points or 0.18 per cent. Intra-day, it rose 106.1 points or 0.45 per cent to hit a new record of 23,664.

Among the 30 Sensex companies, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndusInd Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and HCL Technologies were the gainers.

On the other hand, Titan, Maruti, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance and Power Grid were among the laggards. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.22 per cent to USD 85.14 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 308.37 points or 0.40 per cent to settle at 77,301.14 on Tuesday. The Nifty went up by 92.30 points or 0.39 per cent to hit a record closing high of 23,557.90. *—PTI*

Vegetable and fish prices soar in Kerala

T'PURAM, 19 JUNE

The prices of vegetables and fish are soaring in Kerala, putting a significant dent in the monthly home budgets of the state's residents.

Vendors attribute the rising prices of vegetables to the extreme summer and untimely rains in Tamil Nadu, the major vegetable supplier to Kerala.

Fish prices are skyrocketing due to the shortage of landings caused by the 52-day annual trawling ban which came into effect from 9 June.

"There is very little supply and the prices are very high. When the prices are high, people do not come to buy vegetables," Leela, a vegetable vendor in Palayam market in the state capital, told PTI.

She says she buys tomatoes for Rs 80 per kilogram from the wholesaler and has to sell them for at least Rs 100 to make a profit. "But if I demand Rs 25 for 250 grams, people refuse to buy."

Drumsticks, one of the most preferred vegetables in Kerala curries, are sold at Rs 200 per kg, the longer string beans are sold for Rs 120 per kg and beans are sold at Rs 140 per kg

Fish prices are very high due to less availability following the trawling ban.

Sardines, which are considered the common man's fish and usually sold at Rs 100 and below, are now sold for Rs 300 to 400 per kg.

Fish sellers are relying on supplies of fish from places like Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu to meet the demand. *—PTI*

Vendors attribute the rising prices of vegetables to extreme summer and untimely rains *PHOTO: ANI*

India ranks 63rd on Energy Transition Index

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

India has been ranked 63rd on a global Energy Transition Index released on Wednesday by the World Economic Forum, which said the country has shown significant improvement across energy equity, security and sustainability. European nations dominated the top ranks with Sweden topping the index, followed by Denmark, Finland, Switzerland and France in the top five. China was ranked 20th.

The improvement shown by India and some other developing countries such as China and Brazil assumes significance as 83 per cent of countries have moved backwards from last year in at least one of the three energy system performance dimensions -- security, equity and sustainability.

On the role of China and India, the WEF said that with roughly a third of the global population, these two countries will play a critical role.

Emerging and developing Asia, including populous nations like India and China, showed an 8 per cent improvement in ETI scores over the past decade, mainly in reducing energy intensity.

The WEF also noted India's focus on leveraging energy for income generation and supporting microenterprises through the productive use of renewable energy sources. *—PTI*

AT $7.3 BILLION

Commerce and Industry Ministry highlighted that India shipped 17,81,602 MT (metric tonne) of seafood worth Rs 60,523.89 crore during 2023-24 *PHOTO: ANI*

India records all-time high sea food export in FY24

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

India's seafood exports touched an all-time high in volume during the financial year 2023-24, Ministry of Commerce and Industry said on Wednesday.

The Ministry highlighted that India shipped 17,81,602 MT (metric tonne) of seafood worth Rs 60,523.89 crore (USD 7.38 billion) during 2023-24. The country has achieved that despite various challenges in the export markets.

In terms of major items of export, Frozen shrimp lead in quantity and value, while the USA and China became the major importers of India's seafood.

During FY 2023-24, the export improved in quantity terms by 2.67 per cent. In 2022-23, India exported 17,35,286 MT of seafood worth Rs 63,969.14 crore (USD 8,094.31million).

"India recorded an all-time high export in terms of volume by shipping 17,81,602 MT of seafood worth US$ 7.38 billion, despite the several challenges in its major export markets like the USA, EU & the UK," said DV Swamy IAS, Chairman, Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA).

Frozen shrimp exports from India earned Rs 40,013.54 crore (USD 4881.27 million), representing 40.19 per cent of the total export quantity and 66.12 per cent of the total earnings.

The US was the largest market for frozen shrimp (2,97,571 MT) in the last fiscal. It was followed by China (1,48,483 MT), the European Union (89,697 MT), Southeast Asia (52,254 MT), Japan (35,906 MT), and the Middle East (28,571 MT).

It added that the US continued to be the major importer of Indian seafood in value terms, with an import of USD 2.55 billion in 2023-24. *—PTI*

Air India to launch premium economy class on select routes

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

Air India on Wednesday said it will launch premium economy class on select domestic routes from next month. As of now, Vistara is the only Indian carrier, which offers premium economy-class travel on its domestic routes.

"Air India today unveiled a three-class configuration on its newly inducted narrow-body aircraft. Air India's A320neo aircraft will now offer a new business, an all-new premium economy and a new economy cabin experience on domestic and short-haul international routes," the airline said.

The Tata Group-owned airline said it has refitted two new A320neo aircraft in a three-class configuration, featuring eight seats in business, 24 seats with extra legroom in premium economy, and 132 in the economy category, offering a wider choice to its guests.

This is the first time the airline has introduced premium economy cabins on its narrow-body aircraft.

Delhi-Bengaluru-Delhi and Delhi-Chandigarh-Delhi are the two select routes on which the airline will offer premium economy seats, as per the airline.

Moreover, the airline had in December 2022 announced that it would be investing USD 400-million to refurbish its Boeing 777 and Boeing 787 wide-body aircraft fleet. *—PTI*

Automobile industry grows 19% in FY24: Report

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

The Indian automobile industry grew 19 per cent to Rs 10.22 lakh crore in FY24 driven by a robust growth in the utility and sports utility vehicle (SUV) segment, a report said on Wednesday.

The volume grew by 10 per cent during the year, the report by management consulting firm Primus Partners said.

A notable shift in the UV and SUV segment was that the volume increased by 23 per cent and price by 16 per cent leading to overall value increase by 39 per cent last fiscal year.

Indians are preferring higher, more expensive models across segments, and the average price of vehicles is increasing *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

The average price increase in this segment was due to general rise in prices, shift to higher segment, shift to hybrid and automatic, popularity of sunroof and shift to electric vehicles (EVs), it said.

Indians are preferring higher, more expensive models across segments, and the average price of vehicles is increasing, as per the report.

"India is at the forefront in leading the global automobile race, bypassing lower-priced products and creating more value in feature-rich, higher-priced vehicles. Consumer preferences and robust economic fundamentals are drivers of this transformation in the Indian automobile industry. Significantly, the UV and SUV segments are becoming a preferred choice for most Indian consumers," said Anurag Singh, Managing Director of Primus Partners.

The passenger vehicle (PV) segment saw a decline of 9 per cent in volume due to a slight price increase, resulting in 4 per cent value drop. *—PTI*

BEATS MICROSOFT

Nvidia is world's most valuable firm

SANTA CLARA, 19 JUNE

Chip-maker Nvidia became the world's most valuable company after its share price climbed to an all-time high on Tuesday.

It is now worth USD 3.34 trillion with the price having nearly doubled since the start of this year.

The stock ended the trading day at nearly USD 136, up 3.5 per cent making it more valuable than fellow tech giant Microsoft. It overtook Apple earlier this month.

The Californian company's meteoric rise has been fuelled by its dominance of what analysts call the "new gold or oil in the tech sector" - the chips needed for artificial intelligence (AI).

Jensen Huang' Nvidia is now worth USD 3.34 trillion *PHOTO: PTI*

Speaking at event in Copenhagen, Global Head of Business Development for telco at Nvidia Chris Penrose, said the record valuation was the culmination of more than 30 years of work in the AI field.

Rise and Rise

Eight years ago, the stock was worth less than 1per cent of its current price.

Back then, Nvidia's value came from its competition with rival AMD, in a race to make the best graphics cards.

In recent years though it has benefited from a boom in demand for chips that train and run generative AI models, the most well-known of which being OpenAI's ChatGPT.

The firm also benefitted significantly from a rush to mine Bitcoin in 2020, which saw a sharp uptick in sales of its graphics cards.

The rise and rise of the tech giant has been mirrored by the increasingly high profile of its boss, Jensen Huang.

Some have dubbed the 61-year-old electrical engineer the "Taylor Swift of tech" for the celebrity status he has achieved. *—BBC News*

Hospitality industry to add 1M jobs in few years: Experts

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The hospitality industry is expected to add around 1 million jobs in the next few years as the sector is grappling with huge shortage of talent amid rapid expansion after the Covid-19 pandemic, say experts.

The current demand-supply gap of talent in the industry stands at around 55-60 per cent, indicating a substantial mismatch between the needs and the available talent pool, Randstad India Director, Professional Talent Solutions, Sanjay Shetty told PTI.

Issues related to talent shortage was fuelled by the post-pandemic boom in demand, Shetty said, adding that the the momentum is expected to continue in the next few years with at least a million jobs being created.

The overall hiring has more than quadrupled post-Covid with entry-level positions emerging as the most sought-after in past two years.

Some companies are upskilling existing talent or recruiting from other industries to fill the void, while others have intensified efforts to attract and retain talent by offering competitive benefits. *—PTI*

FC Barcelona shuts down its football academies in India

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

World-renowned football club FC Barcelona has decided to shut down all its academies in India, 14 years after starting operations to train the country's kids in their famed 'La Masia (youth academy)' style. FC Barcelona did not provide any official reason for the closure. All its academies in the Indian cities of Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Pune will cease to exist from 1 July. "FC Barcelona have informed the families involved in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Pune will cease to operate as Barca Academies from 1 July 2024," the club said in a statement which it uploaded on its website.—*PTI*

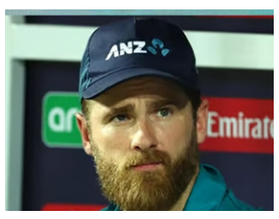


PHOTO: PTI

Williamson steps down as white-ball captain

CHRISTCHURCH, 19 JUNE

Kane Williamson has decided to forego a national contract for 2024-25 and also stepped down from white-ball captaincy in a bid to extend his international career. The news comes a couple of days after New Zealand's shock early exit from the T20 World Cup. "Helping push the team forward across the formats is something I'm very passionate about and something I want to keep contributing towards," the 33-year-old said in a New Zealand Cricket (NZC) release on Wednesday. "However, pursuing an overseas opportunity during the New Zealand summer means I'm unable to accept a central contract offer."—*PTI*

Bangladesh bowler Tanzim fined 15% of match fee

DUBAI, 19 JUNE

Bangladesh seamer Tanzim Hasan Sakib has been fined 15 percent of his match fee for "inappropriate physical contact" during a verbal altercation with Nepal skipper Rohit Paudel in their final group D match of the T20 World Cup. The incident took place in the third over of the Nepal chase on Sunday when Tanzim, after bowling a delivery, walked towards Paudel "in an aggressive manner and made inappropriate physical contact."—*PTI*

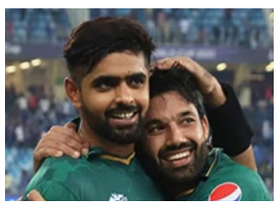


PHOTO: PTI

Several senior Pak players may be rested

LAHORE, 19 JUNE

Several senior members of Pakistan's failed T20 World Cup campaign, including captain Babar Azam, Muhammad Rizwan, and Shaheen Shah Afridi, may be rested for the home Test series against Bangladesh in August.Sources said that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is in touch with Test captain, Shan Masood, who is in England captaining county side Yorkshire, and new red-ball head coach, Australian Jason Gillespie to finalize plans for the Bangladesh series.Pakistan were eliminated after losing their Group A league matches to newcomers USA and arch-rivals India."One of the proposals being considered is giving rest to some senior players namely Babar, Shaheen, Rizwan etc, and instead trying out those players who are uncapped or have just played a few internationals for Pakistan."—*AP*

EURO 2024

Conceicao to the rescue as Portugal snatch 2-1 win over Czechs

Ronaldo became the first player to feature at a sixth European C'ship

LEIPZIG, 19 JUNE

Portugal substitute Francisco Conceicao scored in stoppage time for a 2-1 win over the Czech Republic in their European Championship opening game yesterday.

As Cristiano Ronaldo became the first player to feature at a sixth European Championship, Portugal dominated possession and had the lion's share of the chances but it was the Czech's who took the lead in the 62nd minute when Lukas Provod whipped a stunning strike into the far corner.

Conceicao, who only entered in the 90th minute, fired the ball home in the 92nd after Robin Hranac's attempted block of fellow substitute Pedro Neto's shot fell kindly for the Porto winger to shoot inside the left post."

Portugal's Conceicao celebrates scoring their second goal with teammates *PHOTO: X / PATRICIA DE MELO MOREIRA*

The players that came off the bench showed that the team has a lot of options," Portugal coach Roberto Martinez said. Conceicao wheeled away in delight and was booked for taking off his jersey. It comes almost 24 years to the day since Conceicao's father, Sergio Conceicao, scored a hat-trick to knock defending champions Germany out of Euro 2000.

Czech Republic goalkeeper Jindrich Stanek had thwarted Cristiano Ronaldo as the Portugal star became the first to play at six European Championship tournaments. The 39-year-old Ronaldo could not add to his record 14 goals in his record-extending 26th appearance at the tournament.Portugal's 41-year-old defender Pepe became the oldest player to play at the tournament, though he had little to do as the 2016 champions dominated ball possession and chances."We won because the group is united.

—*AP*

T20 WC: West Indies primed for Super 8

GROS ISLET, 19 JUNE

An in-form West Indies will be keen to carry the winning momentum but won't underestimate familiar foes England in their opening Super Eight clash of the T20 World Cup which promises to be a run fest here. Both England and West Indies are competing for an unprecedented third T20 World Cup title. While the hosts are undefeated in the tournament so far, England had a rather anxious group stage and needed arch-rivals Australia's help to keep alive their title defence.

Having played catch up after a loss against Australia in the league stage, Jos Buttler and his men now have the opportunity to start afresh. **Match starts at 6 am IST** —*PTI*

PHOTO: X / @T20WORLDCUP

T20 WORLD CUP

Kohli is expected to shine against Afghanistan

BRIDGETOWN, 19 JUNE

Virat Kohli will be expected to hit his straps after a lean run while left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav will anxiously wait for his chance when title-favourites India face a sprightly Afghanistan in their opening Super 8 fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

The big talking point ahead of the game is the Indian team combination.

Will India go in with the same line-up that worked for them in the group league stage or bring in their best spinner over the last 12 months, Kuldeep, at the expense of a specialist pacer now?

At the start of the tournament, skipper Rohit Sharma had expressed his keenness to include all four all-rounders Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, and Ravindra Jadeja in the playing eleven.

That strategy suited the Indian team in the bowler-friendly conditions in New York and the captain is expected to retain the winning combination that stretches their batting to number 8.

Indian cricketer Virat Kohli receives a book from former cricketer Sir Wesley Hall during a meeting, in Bridgetown *PHOTO: X / @T20WORLDCUP*

The only way to fit Kuldeep into the team is to either drop Mohammed Siraj or Arshdeep Singh for the wily spinner. If that does happen, Siraj is most likely to be benched.

If the two practice sessions of the Indian team are an indication, the pitch could offer plenty to the spinners making Kuldeep's case stronger. With the gentle breeze blowing across the Kensington Oval, the pacers should get the ball to swing in the powerplay.

As is often the case, all eyes will be on Kohli, who is yet to log a double-digit score in the tournament. His strategy to go for his strokes did not yield the desired results in New York but he is expected to be at his imperious best on the better wickets in the Caribbean. Match starts at 8 pm (IST). —*PTI*

Chopra happy with his adductor plans, to address recurring issue post Olympics

TURKU, 19 JUNE

Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra has opened up about his adductor niggle which has affected his season, saying he will consult "different doctors" after the Paris Olympics to address the nagging issue.

The 26-year-old knew that his effort was special the moment he sent the spear flying as he raised his hands in celebration and let out a trademark roar that has come to be an indicator of his solid performances.

Chopra returned to competitions after a month-long break to fetch his maiden gold medal at the Paavo Nurmi Games here on Tuesday with an effort of 85.97m, which came in his third attempt.

The 26-year-old, who created history by becoming the first Indian to win a track and field medal at the Tokyo Olympics, had withdrawn from last month's Ostrava Golden Spike as a precautionary measure after he felt something in his adductor (group of muscles located on inner thighs). "The weather was good today, a little bit cold with the wind. But I am happy with my adductor now because I could do all 6 throws," Chopra said after the win. "Every year I have some problems with my adductor, maybe after the Olympics, I am going to talk to different doctors."

Neeraj Chopra *PHOTO: X / @NEERAJ____CHOPRA*

Chopra, however, expressed the desire to compete in more competitions this season. He began his season at the Doha Diamond League in May, where he finished second with his final throw of 88.36m, the ninth-best mark of his career.

He then participated at the National Federation Cup Senior Athletics Championships in Bhubaneswar, where he secured the gold medal with an underwhelming effort of 82.27m. "Initially I wanted to compete more this season, but it was not possible due to my niggles," he added.

After the Paavo Nurmi Games, Chopra will next be seen in action at the Paris Diamond League on 7 July.

Chopra will be training in Europe in three different venues along with coach Klaus Bartonietz and physio Ishaan Marwaha ahead of the Paris Olympics.

—*PTI*

Marsh is not just a captain but a leader, says Stoinis

NORTH SOUND, 19 JUNE

Mitchell Marsh is not just a captain but a true leader, Marcus Stoinis said eulogizing his teammate but added that the current Australia group is easy to lead with everyone aware of their roles in specific situations.

Marsh has been tasked with leading Australia to their second T20 World Cup title.

"Mitchie is not a captain but a leader. The way he gets the groups together inspires it," fellow all-rounder Stoinis said on the 'Unplayable' podcast.

"He's been a leader for a long time in this group. He has captained in the past at a younger age as well."

It is not just Stoinis that has lavished praise on the all-rounder, the rest of the team also speaks highly of the 'Bison'.

Marcus Stoinis *PHOTO: X / @MARCUSSTOINIS*

Marsh has had a love-hate relationship with the fans, who booed him when his performance dropped leading the all-rounder to claim "most of Australia hates me".

But Marsh witnessed a resurgence last year and has now become a fan favorite. He made his way back into the Test team and starred in Australia's stunning World Cup win in India.

He also performed well in T20s. He was awarded with the prestigious Allan Border medal earlier this year. —*PTI*

India beat SA by 4 runs to clinch ODI series

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Ebullient hundreds of Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur were nearly upended by remarkable centuries from Laura Wolvaardt and Marizanne Kapp but India kept their nerves to beat South Africa by four runs in a last-over thriller to take an unassailable 2-0 in ODI series here Wednesday.

India had beaten South Africa by 143 runs in the first match here on Sunday.It was a matter of margin once India posted an imposing 325 for three, riding on Mandhana's 136 (120b, 18x4, 2x6) and Harmanpreet's unbeaten 103 (88b, 9x4, 3x6), their seventh and sixth one-day tons respectively. However, the Proteas fought back through Kapp (114, 94b, 11x4, 3x6) and Wolvaardt (135 not out, 135b, 12x4 3x6), who added 184 runs off 170 balls for the fourth wicket, but could manage 321 for six.The Chinnaswamy pitch stayed truer as compared to the previous match,

Indian players celebrate their win in the second ODI cricket match between India-W and South Africa-W at M Chinnaswamy Stadium, in Bengaluru *PHOTO: PTI*

and the Indian bowlers had to be precise in their line and length on this day to be effective. They did just that. At no point, did the home bowlers allow SA batters a free run, picking up wickets at regular intervals?Pacer Arundhati Reddy, who replaced Renuka Singh, gave India a good beginning, beating the defense of Tazmin Brits with a delivery that came in by that bit. However, Mandhana gave the crowd the moment of the day when she accounted for Sune Luus, caught behind by Richa Ghosh, to bag her maiden international wicket.That brought together Wolvaardt and Kapp, who resisted the Indian spinners with excellent footwork and shot selection. Kapp, who made fifty off 53 balls, was the more aggressive of the duo, underlined by her two powerful pulls off Pooja Vastrakar that rocketed to the

Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur *PHOTO: PTI*

fence.

Wolvaardt gave Kapp solid support and brought up her fifty in 69 balls, as she touched the mark with a well-timed swat four to mid-wicket off Vastrakar. They fetched 100 runs for the fourth wicket in 114 balls, when Kapp swept left-arm spinner Radha Yadav for a boundary. India 325 for 3 (Mandhana 136, Harmanpreet 103*, Mlaba 2-51) beat South Africa 321 for 6 (Wolvaardt 135*, Kapp 114, Vastrakar 2-54, Deepti 2-56) by four runs.

—*PTI*

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

I could not walk or even talk properly: Singh

DUBAI, 19 JUNE

Sangram Singh recently announced his intentions to become the first Indian male athlete to enter the world of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) at the age of 38. The former WWP Commonwealth heavyweight champion spoke to IANS in an exclusive conversation to discuss his journey, why he took such a huge step this late in his career, what motivates him, and how he plans to dive into the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in the future.

"I am just starting. I believe UFC and MMA are sisters. I was approached by UFC as well but I believe I should start with MMA, as it is the same thing. Like in wrestling, there is Greco-Roman and freestyle. When it comes to representing your country, it does not matter where you do it, so surely, UFC is in my plans as well.

Sangram Singh *PHOTO: IG/SANGRAMSINGH_WRESTLER*

"Someone was joking with me to try out cricket as well. Life is very short, so you should try to inspire at every chance you get, and I believe the best way to live is selfless living," Singh told IANS.

"I used to suffer from medical problems; I could not walk or even talk properly. The rejection I got from life was my motivation to excel. A kid who could not even stand got into wrestling. I started with mud wrestling and went on to represent my country. I got into pro wrestling and went on to become the Commonwealth heavyweight champion and the best professional wrestler in the world.

"Wrestling has been struggling in the past two years with the protest and everything going on with Brij Bhushan and to see our wrestlers Sakhi Malik, Vinesh Phogat and all going through such tough situations was a sad time for the sport. A lot of parents were against their kids entering the field, which is why I came back to fight after many years," Singh said.

—*AP*

Golf: Anvitha takes 2-shot lead over Lavanya in WPGT

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Anvitha Narender shot the best round of her fledgling professional career to take a 2-shot lead after 36 holes in the eighth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour, here at the Bangalore Golf Club. Playing only her fourth round as a pro, Anvitha (69-65), the Bengaluru-based golfer who was born in New Jersey, shot 5-under 65 and moved two clear of the Gurgaon-based amateur Lavanya Jadon (69-67). After two rounds, Anvitha was 6-under and Lavanya 4-under being the only two players with both rounds under par. Anvitha, who finished tied-8th in her pro debut last week, ran up three birdies in a row from the second and got off to a great start. She dropped shots on the fifth and the ninth to turn in 1-under. On the back nine, she had gains on the 10th and 12th followed by back-to-back birdies on the 16th and 17th for a round of 65. Lavanya, who has represented India as an amateur, opened with a birdie on the first but she gave that away on the eighth.

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